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# A TROUBLESOME GIRL

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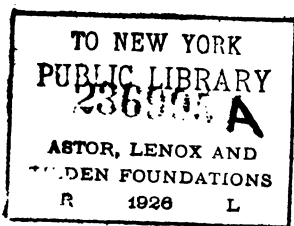
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Hungerford, Margaret Wolfe Hamilton

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1889.



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A TROUBLESOME GIRL.

A NOVEL.

**“I am not covetous for gold;  
But if it be a sin to covet honour  
I am the most offending soul alive.”**

## A TROUBLESOME GIRL.

---

### CHAPTER I.

#### A SLIGHT BREEZE.

“Where should this music be—in the air or on the earth?”

THE last soft sweet note of the singer has died away upon the air—a delicate, well-bred burst of applause follows it—and *then*—a sense of well being amongst the fashionable throng, a knowledge that for the next five minutes their own voices may be heard in dainty diatribes against their mutual friends. It is so close to the end of the season that many regard this musical evening at Lady Swansdown's as really their last in town, and are already dreaming of flight upon the morrow. A flight from fogs, and smoke, and acquaintances, to the calm, cool depths of the country. It is a tremendous crush, and the heat is almost intolerable; so is the perfume of the dying flowers; but everybody, past and present, and future, in an artistic sense is present, so that *not* to be here would mean unhappiness.



The coveted five minutes has already drawn to a close, and now as Lady Swansdown moves towards a corner where a crowd of young men makes the spot dense, everybody glances after her, with a calm sense of expectation.

The crowd parts as she draws near, and permits her to lay her hand upon the shoulder of a girl who had been lost amidst its depths.

"Your turn, dearest. You *will* play, won't you? Every one is so anxious, so on the very tiptoe of hope. Come—come *now*."

She speaks nervously, as if a little afraid of a capricious refusal at the last moment; but the girl, giving her a quiet smile though no word, waives aside the gilded youths who have surrounded her, and steps into the open space outside—her violin in her hand.

Quite calmly, with scarce a touch of consciousness, she moves to the position that has been arranged for her—full into the glare of the many lights, and the many eyes beyond. Yet she is very conscious all the while, and her heart beats cruelly, as she lifts the violin to her shoulder, and slowly raises the bow.

Such a small slender thing! Clad in a clinging gown of amber Indian silk, low and rounded at the neck as a child's frock might be, and with soft puffed sleeves at the shoulders, that leave the white arms bare. Arms destitute of adornment of any sort; without so much as one small bangle, and fingers without a ring. In truth ornaments would have been super-

fluous things where those perfect arms, and wrists, and hands were concerned.

Moving lightly forward, with a little swaying movement peculiar to her, and suggestive of the grace of winged creatures, she comes at last to a standstill and poises herself, very steadily, but with one small foot in its amber satin shoe, just showing beneath her gown. Her dark brilliant eyes are radiant, a delicate fleck of colour has come into her cheek, her hair curling over her white brow has fallen a little forward. It is cut quite short this pretty hair, and covers her head in rippling masses, that are so deeply auburn as to be *almost* red, but yet are *not*; she has been mercifully saved from that!

The whole face is eager, passionate, and not without a touch of temper. The chin, a little pointed, is a feature in itself. There is determination in it, and wilfulness, but on the whole it suits the mischievous face, and adds a piquancy to its beauty. With the bright eyes, and close cut auburn curls, this pretty, half-frightened child looks more like a boy than a girl as she stands with her violin pressed against her beating heart.

And now the magic of her touch makes itself known; swelling, throbbing through the room, her music rushes, thrilling the appreciative, and rendering even the indifferent dumb. What power! What genius! And as she plays, the first subdued but yet *felt* nervousness vanishes; the girl fades, the artist alone re-

mains. A smile that is almost seraphic, and that is quite unconscious, curves her lovely lips. That she lives in this moment a life beyond all that the mere material world can give is beyond doubt.

The exquisitely modelled hand and arm gleam against the amber of her gown. Now and again, as if impatient with them, she flings back the auburn curls from her brow; and still she plays, with a *verve*, a passion, that only those who have the divine spark can know. Wagner is her study to-night, and she interprets him with a wild belief in him that almost makes her co-partner in his triumphs.

When the last eager sweetness of the notes has died away, she lets her arms fall to her sides, violin in one hand, bow in the other, and barely acknowledging the thunderous applause that greets her, turns aside, and enters an alcove in an ante-room adjoining that in which she had been distinguishing herself, to find her cousin there awaiting her.

"A triumph, indeed," says Colonel Dalrymple, taking the hand with the bow in it, and leading her to a seat.

She is a little too breathless, too disturbed by her success, to be able to speak just at first, but if her mouth is dumb her eyes are not; in those great, dark, gloomy orbs that now she raises to his, distrust and anger, and distinct unfriendliness are written. Reading all this, Colonel Dalrymple gives her a full-grown glance in return, in which if the unfriendliness and the *other things* are left out, a good deal of amusement

takes their place. He is still holding her hand, and now, as if in defiance of her expression he presses it warmly—whereupon he instantly loses possession of it.

“Yes; I was charmed,” says he, taking no notice of her angry withdrawal of her hand. “With the eyes of everyone upon you, you still achieved a success that is hardly to be rivalled in *this* generation. Even I myself——.”

“Pouf!” says she, interrupting him unceremoniously, a little frown darkling all her face. “Do you think I am a fool? Compliments to whom compliments are due. Good enough! But none from *you*, thank you! Don’t I know you?”

“Well, you should,” says he, mildly.

“Well, I *do*. And I know that you regard with contempt the woman who could stand up before her world, however small, and let herself be publicly admired. By herself,” hastily, “I mean her talent. Come now, say the truth for once; confess you think me forward, brazen, vain, and all the rest of it?”

“You are so evidently anxious that I *should* so confess myself, that I really hardly like to refuse you,” says he, coldly. “But as you are also desirous of hearing me speak the truth, if only for once in my life, I feel bound to say that you are wrong in your surmise; I have not up to this regarded you as vain, brazen, or forward.”

“So says your tongue, but your eyes say something

else," returns she, with a petulant but charming uplifting of the shoulder near him.

"My eye offends me then—shall I pluck it out?" asks Dalrymple, a slightly mocking expression in the feature in question. "Why should I say one thing and mean another? Be sensible, my little cousin. Am I so afraid of you that I should lie to you?"

"I'm tired," says the "little cousin," tilting up her chin, and looking over his shoulder with an exaggerated air of one desirous of escape; "I should like to go home if grandpapa——Ah! Dicky—*you!*"

She grows suddenly radiant, and transferring the bow to the small hand that already finds the violin too much for it, gives the free little fingers to the new comer—a middle-sized youth of a distinctly ugly, if delightful, countenance.

"Buried alive; genius for once in the shade. I've been commissioned to dig you out," says he, his face all one brilliant grin. "Lady Swansdown said you were here, but that as Dalrymple was your companion, she——" He pauses, struck by a stony glance from the slender maiden before him.

"Please go on," says she, in a terrible voice. "Noel and I are quite longing to hear the end of that remarkable beginning of yours. Why should Lady Swansdown imagine that because Noel was with me I——" Here *she* pauses, and with hot cheeks turns angrily towards Dalrymple, as if hardly knowing how to go on.

"It is a conundrum! Never guessed one in my life. Give it up," says he promptly, gravely, but with that suppressed amusement in voice and face that always enrages her.

"It is *not* a conundrum, it is an impertinence," says she steadily. She turns to Dicky—Mr. Sylvester—the brother of her dearest friend, and lays her hand upon his arm.

"I should like some champagne—and Grandpapa," says she, motioning him with a little vivacious pressure towards the moving crowd beyond.

"Grandpapa will be sufficient in himself—he is a perfect tonic," says Dalrymple unmoved, addressing himself to the back of her departing head. She hears him, however, and unable to refuse herself the joy of battle turns once more.

"I require it," says she quickly, "considering I have been with *you* for five minutes."

"Oh! I say, come on, *do*. I never saw such a girl as you are to fight," says Mr. Sylvester, giving her a little pull.

"Well, it is only when I am with Noel!" declares she, with a whimsical twist of her charming head, at last permitting herself to be drawn into the outer room.

Dalrymple left alone, smiles again! This time a little bitterly.

---

## CHAPTER II.

MR. BARBOUR IS DISCONTENTED.

"Oh, who shall lightly say that Fame  
Is nothing but an empty name!"

As the pretty heroine of the hour drew her lute for the last time across her fiddle, and beat her retreat, under cover of the well-deserved applause which greeted her artistic finish, a tall, loosely-built man, who had been speechlessly attentive all through her play, turns suddenly to his companion—a man also.

"Professional?" asks he, as if a little puzzled.

"Good Heavens, no!" says Sir John Amory, with a slight laugh. "Though, after all, your question should not so much surprise me. She *can* play, can't she?"

"Play! It was astonishing! *Not* professional the word! There is a touch of relief in his tone. A professional and *such* a one, and he not to know it! No, the word has not come to an end yet.

"Mere amateur. Do you mean to say you have not heard her before? Your ignorance, my dear Barbour, is astounding. Not to know *her* argues you yourself unknown. Why, where have you been, and have not to have seen her, here or there, throughout the season?"

"Can't bear crushes; very seldom go to them," says Barbour, as if in self-defence. "And I suppose she never gets out of strictly proper society grooves. Who is she? It is difficult to believe she is only that inconsequent creature—the amateur."

"The orthodox reading of that word is certainly a libel on her—but she must plead guilty to it, for all that. She is the Hon. Eleanor Fairfax, grand-daughter of old Lord Carbyne, and heiress to his immense wealth."

"An heiress, and a fiddler!" says Barbour, with a groan.

"I can see how you regard it. Yes; quite an important little person in herself, even if you leave out the marvellous gift."

"Bah! what a *bêtise*! Mother Nature should be ashamed of herself," says the big man, with an angry shake of his leonine head. "*I* could have made that girl's fortune, and here she has one without my aid. It is an act of unparalleled injustice."

"Tut, you can never take your mind off the boards," says Sir John Amory, lightly. "You would not let the poor rich folk have any of the tit-bits of life. Pray try to come down for a moment or two to our poor level, and see that talent may occasionally be of service to a private individual, though she may not need to make her living out of it."

"I have come down," says Barbour quaintly, "yet I cannot help thinking how unmeasurably of greater use



a genius such as hers might be to a poor devil without a farthing." There is some honest feeling in his words, though they are uttered jestingly. An excellent actor for many years, until circumstances compelled him to leave the stage, he is now the lessee of one of the most popular theatres in town, an authority amongst the artistic lot, and a man much sought after by fashionable London. A kindly man, with a heart as large as his body—which is saying a good deal.

Sir John, a young man of thirty or thereabouts, laughs a little.

"You evidently grudge Miss Fairfax the divine spark," says he. "Don't tell her so, she might not forgive you. The Fairfax blood is famous for its warmth, and she was born with a goodly heritage I hear, so far as temper goes."

"I grudge her nothing," says Barbour; "I only say to myself, 'There goes a comfortable competence for somebody,' and it is absorbed by a little girl who doesn't want it at all: a rich little girl, and one with beauty thrown into her bargain."

"It certainly sounds unfair as you put it."

"It is monstrous! A Paganini in petticoats, and all for nothing."

"Not quite that. Miss Fairfax draws the chief pleasure of her life from her talent——"

"*Genius*, my dear fellow!"

"—And manages besides to soothe the temper of that terrible old pagan grandfather of hers, by means

of it. His evil moods are proverbial, and she and her violin alone can sometimes induce him to listen to reason."

"We are determined to turn her into a boy," says Barbour laughing. "First I make her a Paganini, and now you would have her play David to your Saul. An absurd conceit! I dare say something might be made of it," musing.

"Oh, *don't*," says Amory with an imploring gesture; "forget the beloved stage for a moment or two."

"Right—right," says Barbour, who is the soul of good humour. "Laugh and grow fat," says a merry old sage, and truly his wisdom has been exemplified in the person of this stout "merryman," who is of a girth that might well by Dominie Sampson have been called "*Prodeegious*." "Still," says he, "you must confess yourself that she lends herself to the idea! That little clipped head of hers, with its crisp locks, might well be a boy's; truly, 'tis a shame," says he, stroking his beard. "Beauty and genius, *both* to find shelter under that one small roof!"

"A well thatched one!" says Amory. "Her cousin—Miss Sylvester—you know her, I think? She is wonderfully fond of her." It would seem as though, in Sir John's opinion, to be admired by Miss Sylvester is a passport to all the virtues.

"Miss Sylvester her cousin! Oh, *ho!* she has another cousin, then," as if recollection suddenly returns to him. "Colonel Dalrymple—man in the Lifeguards."

"You know him?"

"Very well indeed. Engaged to her, isn't he?"

"As for that no one is quite sure. At all events if there is an engagement it can only be in its first stage. However, the world talks of it. The old man, Lord Carbyne, is all for it, and as he is an arbitrary old person, and she is absolutely dependent upon him, I daresay it will come off."

"Not if she is inclined to rebel," says Barbour, having in his mind that small mutinous face, that but a few moments since held all the room in silence.

"I don't fancy for that matter that there is much love lost between them," says Amory with a shrug, "on her part at all events. But 'a little aversion,' you know, is generally supposed to be an excellent ingredient in the commencement of a matrimonial career, and I daresay she will give in in the end, like most women. Persistency is the thing that conquers them. They would do anything rather than be worried."

"Would they?" says Barbour, who seems amused. "Most sapient sage! where did you gain your depths of knowledge?"

"Not from *you*, at all events," says Sir John, laughing, who evidently regards Barbour with a curious affection. "*You*, who believe in everything and everybody. Well, she is a quaint little creature anyway; so perverse! The very fact that her grandfather wishes her to marry her cousin would no doubt militate against his chances. She is all for fame, and glory, and violin."

"It is interesting. One would like to keep an eye on her, to follow it to the end," says Barbour.

"The law does not forbid such mild inspection," says Amory. "*Keep* your eye on her by all means if it so pleases you."

"In the event of her quarrelling with her grandfather, she would be left to her own resources?"

"Quite so. Not a penny can be hers unless the old man so wills it."

"There will probably be an entr'acte," says Barbour slowly.

"Dear me, no;" says Amory easily. "How stagey you always are! Poverty is so painful a thing that she will probably do anything to escape it."

"You have not taken her chin and her violin into consideration," says Barbour mildly. "I tell you, it will be interesting. I should esteem it an honour if I might be introduced to her."

"An eye to future possibilities?" says Amory with an amused glance. "The world *is* right, you are a great man! 'An opportunity once lost,' says the moral copy-book, 'is never to be regained.' *You* lose no time. You believe you will have this distinguished young violinist on your hands before long."

"I hope not," says Barbour gravely. "But if ever it was in my power to give her a helping hand, I should like to do it. From all you have told me it is possible she *may* come to loggerheads with her grandfather."

"Always the dramatic instinct; you are incurable," says Amory, shaking his head.

"Well," says Barbour apologetically, "I only think that she is young, pretty, and *rebellious*, if I am not an utter duffer about humanity. And I have helped many a one to a good living, or to—home again, as the case might be."

"I know—I know," says Amory, who indeed knows of many a case where Barbour has been as an angel unawares.

"You will introduce me," says the latter, breaking through the other's memories.

"With pleasure! She has a craze for 'the profession,' as you call yours, so you may be sure of a pretty welcome. Come—this way—I saw her just now, going with Dicky Sylvester towards the supper room."

---

## CHAPTER III.

## A STORM.

"I would do what I pleased, and doing what I pleased, I should have my will; and having my will, I should be contented, and when one is contented, there is no more to be desired; and when there is no more to be desired, there is an end of it."

"No, grandpapa, I will not!"

"And I tell you, you *shall*!"

"You tell me a great deal," says Miss Fairfax, with a little scornful smile.

"Sit down, Eleanor. I insist upon settling this matter once for all. Your cousin is not only willing to give in to my whim and marry you, but is violently attached to you."

"Pshaw!" says Miss Fairfax, promptly, and with much eloquence.

"Don't attempt to 'Pshaw' me!" roars Lord Carbyne, now thoroughly incensed, and started with every favourable symptom on the road to a fine rage. "Do you think a little absurd girl like you is to frustrate a plan of mine? I tell you, I've set my heart on this marriage; I can't last long, and there isn't a soul in this world to receive you when I am gone. Therefore,"—striking his crutch upon the ground—"marry you must, in my

life-time, that I may be sure of your welfare before giving myself up to the worm."

There is extreme kindness, and love and longing in this speech, but, unfortunately, all are marred by the fierceness with which he utters it.

"I can take care of myself," says she, sullenly—poking her small foot to and fro across a dark patch in the turkey carpet.

"That is what you can't do—you, with your infer——a—ahem——: I *never* saw a girl who could put me out so much as you do. You *can't* take care of yourself. Your sole longing is to get away from civilized life, and try your fortune on the stage."

"Oh, no, *not* the stage," says she.

"Stage—concert room—it is all the same. You fancy you have genius because you can bring out a decent note or two from that fiddle of yours; but I can tell you——"

"Well, if you despise my fiddle," says she, catching up that beloved friend, and preparing to beat an indignant retreat, "you certainly can't want to hear it to-day; so there was little use in my coming. And what a *story-teller* you must be, grandpapa," turning flashing eyes on him, "to pretend, so often as you have done, that you found pleasure in my playing."

"That's one thing, to please an old man; to please a cultured public quite another. There! where are you going, Eleanor? Sit down again, I say. You have not at all understood me about this proposal of Noel's."

"Good Heavens! what is there to understand?" says she, with a stamp of her foot. "You want me to marry him; I *don't* want to marry him. There it all lies in the palm of your hand. Quite a little affair: and the victory lies with me. Marry him I never shall."

"Then I shall disinherit you," cries her grandfather, hitting the ground with his crutch. "You understand that *too*, I hope. Not a penny—not a penny."

"I don't care," says she, after one long minute. "I still have *this*," tapping her violin.

"Well—take it—and go; I've done with you. See what that precious bit of wood will do for you," says he, still in a fury of anger and disappointment. "See if it will bring so much grist to the mill as will compensate you for Carbyne Castle, and all its land."

"You are rather vulgar, do you know, grandpapa," says she, gathering up her violin and moving towards the door. "There must have been a wealthy *bourgeois* somewhere in your family. You think money is everything—I don't. You have threatened me; you have said you will disinherit me; you shan't do that twice."

"I don't suppose I shall," says he with a chuckle. "You will re-consider it, and give up playing the fool."

"I certainly shan't marry Noel—if that is what you mean."

"But why not? What is there against him? He is young, handsome, rich——"

"Possibly *nothing*. He may be immaculate for all



I know—or care. The fact remains that I don't want to marry *anyone*. I am"—pausing, and giving a tragic tone to her voice—"married already!"

"*What!*" roars the old man.

"To this; to my violin," says she, laughing in spite of herself, and laying her lovely flushed cheek with ineffable grace upon the beautiful instrument pressed against her heart.

"A truce to such rubbish," says Lord Carbyne. "There, go. Quit my sight. You have heard my decision. Think it over, I advise you."

"I am not easily frightened," says she in a low, curious tone. In truth, just now, it seems to her that it would be a sweet experience to find herself alone in the world, with her violin for a sole friend. With it to carve a fortune. That strange man, Mr. Barbour, had hinted to her of delightful possibilities on the night before she left town, now a fortnight ago. The cool freshness of the country had not killed the longing to which his words had given life. Oh! to be free; penniless, indeed, but with a fortune before her and a wild hope that, in time, the breath of fame might yet descend upon *her* head. To escape, too, from an enforced marriage!—and, with Noel, of a people! A man who sneered at her longing for public career—who said she was not suited to that sort of thing. Well—she could show him!

It all runs through her wilful mind as she stands there, apparently bent on immolating the roses in the

pretty Etruscan jar beneath her fingers, whilst her grandfather storms freely, and says many a thing that to-morrow he will regret.

"Above all things," he winds up, furiously, "I consider Noel to be the one man in the world for such a headstrong child as you. He has character and common sense for two. He will hold you well in hand, and control your ridiculous vagaries."

"He shall never control *me*," says she, in a little choking tone, and without another word she throws up her pretty, proud head and marches to the door. There she turns and looks back at him, her face pale but determined. "You have said your last word, grand-papa," says she, "And I—*have said mine!*"

---

## CHAPTER IV.

## MARY SYLVESTER PLEADS IN VAIN.

"I cannot love him,  
Yet I suppose him virtuous, know him noble."

CROSSING the hall with a view to reaching her own room, without contact with any one staying in the house, she finds her hope frustrated by a sweet clear voice.

"What is it, Nell? What a hurry you are in; and how angry you look! Come in here and tell me all about it," taking her arm and drawing her into a small drawing-room. "The same old story, I suppose. Lord Carbyne wants you to marry Noel, and you——"

"*Don't!*" says Miss Fairfax sharply. She moves impatiently from her friend's grasp and throws herself into a low chair. "It has been the worst encounter yet," she says, with a queer little laugh. "He is to disinherit me unless I marry Noel; so—disinherited I am."

"Oh, no," says Mary Sylvester, quickly. She is a tall, distinguished-looking girl of about four-and-twenty, with marked features and an expression cold but earnest. She might not trouble herself to be an enemy, but she

could certainly rouse herself to be a friend. That she is a thorough woman of the world may be read by the most casual observer. She looks troubled now as she watches the petulant anger on the face of her little companion. "It will never come to that."

"But, oh, yes, say I. Grandpapa is bent on this marriage, and, as for me, I am bent just the other way. He will not give in, and neither shall I."

"But why not, dear,"—very gently. "What is it that you can object to in Colonel Dalrymple? He is rich——"

"I hate money! Money is a bore. I am being so perpetually reminded of it, that now at last I feel it would be good to be without it."

"He is young and——"

"*Young!*"

"Certainly. *Quite* young! Only thirty."

"What's the good of that if he looks forty, and is grave and stern enough for fifty. Tell you what, Mary, he is, in my opinion, old enough to be his own father. I'm not going to marry a death's head."

"What has he been scolding you about lately?" asks Miss Sylvester with a smile.

"Never mind. When is he *not* lecturing me, for the matter of that?"

"To go back to his perfections, then. You cannot, at least, deny that he is handsome."

"*Can't* I? Positively ugly *I* call him."

"You are determinedly blind," says her friend, a

little impatiently. "You know he is immensely better looking than half the men one meets."

"I can't bear that look in his eyes. So mocking, yet so stern. I am sure he would like to compel all creatures to his will."

"I rather like that in a man."

"Do you?" with a shrug. "It seems to me you like everything about him. Say, Mary," seating herself on the table near Miss Sylvester and gazing at her with eager hope in her eyes. "I see a way out of the difficulty. You can't want more than a paragon, can you? Why not marry Noel yourself?"

Miss Sylvester laughs.

"For one thing, because he has not asked me; for another, because——"

"Somebody else has," cries Nelly.

Miss Sylvester blushes faintly and nods her head.

"No! Not Charlie Lyons?"

"No."

"Sir John Amory, then?"

"Yes."

"Well, I *am* glad; that is if you *must* be so silly as to marry," says Nell, with a sigh. "I suppose you like him, but, you will never be *my* Mary again. Everything seems slipping from me"—ruefully—"even you."

She has one arm round Miss Sylvester's neck by this time, and is running her fingers through the unruffled locks of that rather stately creature, and having locked two small fingers inside her immaculate collar

is giving her angry little jerks every now and then. Altogether, indeed, she is doing great injury to the calm perfection of her toilette; yet Miss Sylvester bears it like a lamb.

"Not all the John Amorys in the world shall make me lose touch with you," says she fondly, smoothing the girl's short curls.

"After all," says Nell, breaking into a sudden laugh, "you haven't been over complimentary to your John. You like a man who can bend all others to his will, and John could not bend a fly. A man should be rich; John is not so very rich, is he? A man should be handsome—well, now, come; John is *not* handsome, is he?"

"No," confesses Mary Sylvester, with a laugh. "And yet," colouring warmly; "do you know, Nell, there are moments when I think he is."

This so delights the other, that forgetful of her troubles, and the strange new determination working in her mind, she goes off into a peal of laughter.

"Oh! what it is to be in love! May Heaven defend me from such a folly. Well, there is one thing, Mary; to my eyes, he is ten times better looking than Noel, with all his vaunted good looks. Give me a kind man, not a monster."

"My dear Nell! Noel is the kindest fellow!"

"That's what the world thinks. I alone know him. If I were to marry him, the very first thing he would do, would be to forbid my ever playing the violin ex-

cept in the privacy of my own room, or to *him*—  
a slight grimace.

“All this is mere fancy.”

“Is it? You should have seen his eyes the night at Lady Swansdown’s, when they were applied to me. They literally *burned* in his head. No, his beliefs that date from the Dark Ages. Women should be kept in their proper place. A man’s wife is his chattel, and should never, *never* permit herself to expose upon her the compliments of the crowd.”

“You make him out terribly illiberal, he——

“You have found the very word I have been looking for. He *is* illiberal. Why should he be angry because God has given me a talent, and other men can do without it, if he cannot.”

“Perhaps he is jealous—of the other men.”

“Tell him that,” says Miss Fairfax, with a malicious little grin. “And see how *pleased* he’ll be. A man who prides himself on his strength of will to be the prey of vulgar emotion such as *that!*”

“Still—he might be, Nell,” with a suspicion of self-barrassment. “Answer me one thing, will you? don’t be angry with the question. Lord Darnley—do you do not care for *him*?”

“How many times am I to tell you I care for nothing but my violin?” To Miss Sylvester’s anxious ears, however, in spite of the carelessness of the reply, there seems to be a touch of consciousness in the short pause that accompanies it.

"I am glad of that," she says steadily, watching the lovely mobile face as she speaks. "He would be the last—the *very* last husband one who loved you would choose for you."

"Not even the one who loves me shall choose a husband for me," says Miss Fairfax gaily. "A gown, a ribbon, even my bonnet, if you will, but not my partner for life. I shall reserve the choosing of that troublesome, and indeed improbable, person for myself."

"Well, don't choose Dartford," says Miss Sylvester gravely.

"Do you think Noel so very superior to him? I don't. At least Lord Dartford has a soul for music. What a touch! When he accompanies me I feel as though there were nothing left to be desired."

"There is Nell, a great deal!"

"To such a prosaic old thing as *you*, yes. You are nearly as bad as Noel! But to a foolish enthusiast like *me*. *Nothing* I tell you—nothing. That other night at the Moores'! *How* he rendered that 'Reverie.' I could have cried."

"You didn't, however," says Mary Sylvester coldly, with a view to reducing her once more to a proper frame of mind. It is unfortunate perhaps that her friend should so thoroughly understand her. Miss Fairfax looks amused. Her pretty brows go up, the corners of her lips come down, a malicious twinkle brightens her dark eyes.



"No, and it speaks badly for me, Mary. You know those lines of Shakespeare's:

" 'The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.'

Now read that the other way round and surely have Dartford. He *does* love music, you must acknowledge that, therefore all bad thoughts and feelings far from him. Happy Dartford!" Clasp ing her hand in fervent admiration. "Would that *all* were like him! Do you know, Mary, I'm afraid Noel is never more 'with concord of sweet sounds'.

" 'The motions of *his* spirit are dull as night,  
And his affections dark as Erebus,  
Let no such man be trusted.'

Mark *that*. His affections, dark as Erebus. . . again, 'let no such man be trusted.' I am sorry poor Noel."

"Nonsense!" angrily. "You should not speak of him like that."

Miss Fairfax bursts out laughing.

"Nevertheless, he is a dull fellow," says she, laughing. "There is no music in him. Not a note, the smallest pipe. Music and charity are akin to him. I know."

"You have taken him in quite a wrong spirit," says Mary, with some vehemence. "You teach yourself to think him opinionated and severe, and that he does not care for you, or for talent; whereas the truth

that he is as foolishly in love with you as any school-boy, and that you could wind him round your little finger, did it so suit you."

"Well—it doesn't; I trust my little finger was made for better purposes," says Miss Fairfax with a naughty *moue*. "Oh! Mary, do you honestly—*honestly* think I have genius? Do you believe that if I—had been born a poor girl, without a farthing of my own, that I could have made money by it? *That* is the test!"

"I do indeed believe it," wondering at her earnestness, but unfortunately not grasping the meaning of it. "But you should be thankful, dearest, that no such test is required of you."

"Yes, yes, of course," hastily. "Yet I should like to try."

"To go on the stage, do you mean?"

"Not that exactly. But at concerts now! to play to the public *so*. To play to private people is nothing, they flatter, and tell one all sorts of pretty things—but oh! to have the *world* at one's feet, if only for one little, *little* moment."

"Be thankful you can't," says Miss Sylvester, brusquely for her, "such a life as you describe would be abhorrent to you. It would kill such a little sensitive thing as you. All that sort of thing sounds entrancing when one is well out of it; but to *really* have to work for one's gingerbread takes the gilt off it."

"I can't believe it," says Eleanor impetuously, slipping off the table and beginning to pace up and

down the room with some excitement in her voice and eyes. "The life you advocate is tame, wearisome monotonous. There is too much snug comfort in it—there is in fact *nothing* in it. But in that other—where by one's exertions one conquers Fate and the world, there surely lies the noblest of ambitions. Oh Mary, if I dared speak to you. If"—stopping short and gazing fixedly at her friend—"if I could lay bare to you all that is now within my heart—I——"

"I say, girls, where are you? Nell, Mary, where the—what on earth are you doing in here, wasting all the afternoon?" cries Dicky Sylvester, bursting into the room at this moment, and for ever checking Miss Fairfax's attempt at confession. "There's Dalrymple giving way to bad language because I won't play a single with him; I know him too well for *that*, so I do beseech you as you love me to come out, and let's have a double."

"It is so warm," says his sister, laughing.

Amory is in London still, and is not expected down until the evening.

"I know it. But what will you? Dalrymple's temper is warm too. He grows ferocious. Will you abandon me to his untender mercies? Nell, my best beloved," tucking his hand through her slender arm. "Come to the rescue."

"Come on, Mary," says she, in a resigned tone, and in truth perhaps a little grateful to him for the sudden entry that has left her secret still her own.

"You know when Dicky's mind is made up, naught is left save to lay down one's arms."

"I wish I could lay down my body," says Mary, with a stifled yawn. "I never felt so tired. The heat is terrible, and to be asked to play tennis in it, is— Well! if I die, Dicky, put a decent stone over me. It will be your duty, having been the means of placing me under it."

"'Naught was never in danger,'" quotes Mr. Sylvester gallantly, giving her a gentle push towards the door.

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## CHAPTER V.

## DICKY DISTINGUISHES HIMSELF.

“The time I’ve lost in wooing,  
In watching and pursuing  
The light that lies  
In woman’s eyes,  
Has been my heart’s undoing.”

OUTSIDE, the world is in a blaze of glory, although now the sun is preparing to abdicate his throne. The day is wonderfully still, scarce a murmur coming from land or sea, to break the calm. The very intensity of the heat seems to have rendered all Nature silent. As silent indeed, as the All-Mother can be. Yet if you lend your ear, and give your whole mind to it, and conquer the first thought that noise at last is dead, then you will hear the chirp of the grasshopper, low buried in the turf beneath your feet; the rustle of small leaves; the sighing of faint breezes that but yesterday rushed madly through the field and wood, and now lie bound and chained—all which things, with many others, do make up the music of the world.

Afar off, towards the west, the eye rests upon the sunset, more exquisite than any dream. Dying truly, *but most lovely* in its death. The rich gold of it

spreads like a sweet curtain half across the sky. Down below is the ocean, placid, and treacherous as ever, whilst on the grassy slopes which hang over it, sheep nibble at the short sweet herbage, looking in the distance like mushrooms dotted here and there.

Mr. Sylvester, in a resplendent suit of flannels, waves aloft his racket as he shouts to one afar:

"I've got 'em. I've brought 'em. *Now* for a licking!"

"That depends," says Colonel Dalrymple, the one addressed, rising with alacrity, suggestive of surprise, from his position upon the grass. He is, in fact, more than commonly surprised at the fact that Nell has consented to come out and play a game with him. In truth they had played a very different sort of game in the morning, in which many unpleasant words had been used, and where, as usual, he had come off anything but conqueror.

"You'll see, my fine fellow;" says Dicky. "Mary and I will play you and Nell, and make you sing as small as any robin."

"Oh, no!" says Nell, quickly. "You and I, Dicky, I'm *sure*, Dicky," in a wheedling tone, "I'm not so very bad."

"I decline to go into the morality of the thing," says Mr. Sylvester, severely. "Even if you *are* as black as you're painted far be it from me to be the one to point out your glaring defects. Still, as a tennis player,

I will admit you leave much to be desired, whereas Dalrymple leaves nothing. See?"

"I think you might try me this once," murmurs she, in a voice not meant for the others.

"Your predilection for my society," returns Mr. Sylvester, in a loud and cheerful tone, "is flattering in the extreme. But if we are to play to win, my good child, permit me to say that you and I, against Mary and Dalrymple, would not have the vaguest chance of gaining the laurel crown."

"If you don't want to play with me, Eleanor, why not say so at once," says Dalrymple, coolly. He is a tall, handsome, soldierly young man, with dark eyes and dark hair, and a moustache as dark as either. There is no doubt that the famous Carbyne temper runs through his veins too, as he stands now looking at the dainty disdainful little maiden, who looks back at him from under half closed lids.

"It isn't so much that," says she, slowly, "as that I would rather play with Dicky. *He* is never rude to me when I miss my balls."

"Do you mean that I am?"

By this time Mary Sylvester and her brother have moved away, the latter to adjust the net, the other to get out of hearing.

"Well, not more specially then, than at any other time, I admit."

"Your imagination is your strong point, beyond all doubt."

"Which means," wrathfully, "that I am telling an untruth."

"It means this, only," fiercely, "that I don't believe I was ever rude to you in my life, whatever you have been to *me*!"

"Now, what's *that* I wonder," says she, with a little scornful laugh. "The essence of politeness I suppose——"

"I say, you two!" calls Mr. Sylvester from the further end of the court, "stop your spooning, and come along, will you! We won't be able to see the net presently."

This mistaken speech is as successful as if it had really struck the bull's eye. Both Nell and Dalrymple, after an inward struggle, burst out laughing, and turn mechanically towards the place appointed them; and presently the game is in full swing.

"Ah!" says Dalrymple presently, almost unconsciously, as Nell misses a rather easy ball. There is no reproach in his tone, nothing but regret for her mishap; but she refuses to read it, except in its worst sense.

"There! I *knew* how it would be," says she, flashing round at him. "That's why I *hate* playing with you. Just as if *you* never missed a ball!"

"I assure you, I only meant that——"

"I know very well what you meant. You needn't explain, thank you. After all, if I'm not a great, strong, *horrid* man, it isn't *my* fault, I suppose."



"You're tired I think," says Dalrymple, *too* considerably.

"No, I'm not. I'm going to play this out, if only to be revenged on you," says she, with such an absurd attempt at the vengeance threatened that Dalrymple involuntarily smiles, and adds another sin to his already over-full list.

"Good gracious! Can't you spare even five minutes out of the whole day?" calls Sylvester indignantly. "Whenever I'm in love, I keep my tender speeches for the passages and the stairs. Anything more bare-faced than *your* behaviour I never knew in my life."

"*Go on!*" says Nell, giving Dalrymple a furious little push, whereupon he sends an impossible ball into the very farthest corner of the court.

"Fault!" from Sylvester.

"There! that's worse than anything *I* ever did," says Nell triumphantly. And then: "What a *temper* you're in!" After which the second ball drops this side of the net, and the score is to the enemy. And so on throughout. Dalrymple, feeling thoroughly put out, plays villainously. Needless to say, Dicky and his sister win the game.

"Heat's too much for you, old man," says Sylvester, giving Dalrymple a playful, if hurtful, slap on the shoulder. "Never saw you do worse. And as for Nelly, she surpassed herself. Is that tea I see crossing the lawn? Hurry up, Tompkins!" with an encouraging

shout to the languid footman. "*You* haven't been playing tennis, have you?"

Upon this Tompkins *does* condescend to hurry, and arrives breathless on the scene with a rather overloaded tray and a broad grin.

"You pour out, Dicky; I'm quite done up," says Nell, sinking upon a soft rug spread orientalwise upon the grass, and making a place for Mary to sit beside her; whereupon Dicky, who is accustomed to being cast for this part, manipulates the teapot with much grace, whilst Dalrymple hands round the tiny hot cakes.

"Now for you, Dalrymple," says Dicky presently. "Tea, claret-cup, brandy and soda? Tea, *of course*."

"No, the other thing," laughing.

"Claret cup, then?"

"No; the *other* thing!"

"Fie, fie!" says Mr. Sylvester, who is already provided with a goodly goblet of that modern Hippocrene. "Nell, you should keep an eye on him. Never marry a man who can't find satisfaction in the simple, if slightly mawkish, tea."

"Dicky, dear, give me another cup," says Miss Sylvester, ever so mildly, turning herself to give her empty cup to her brother in such wise that he alone can see her face, whereupon she bestows on him so many nods and becks *without* the wreathed smiles that that simple-minded youth goes hopelessly astray.

"Got a bad pain?" asks he, in a loud whisper, meant to be confidential. "You look *awful*! Bless

me!" as now his sister positively *glares* as him. "You are getting worse, aren't you? Try some of this," holding out to her his brandy and soda. "Best thing out for——"

"*Dicky!*" says his sister, in a tone so terrible that it reduces him to silence. Rising, she seizes him by the arm and draws him towards the tent where the tea has been placed. *Anything* to get away from those other two, who now *must* know that she had been making signs to Dicky to be silent. That luckless person still consumed with anxiety about her, follows her lead, pouring out recipes all the time in a loud and cheerful tone, which he fondly but erroneously believes to be a delicate murmur.

Nell has risen too. A flush of annoyance has mounted to the auburn curls that encircle her low broad brow.

"Going for a stroll?" asks Dalrymple carelessly glancing up at her without a trace of consciousness in his face. Has he not heard, then? Miss Fairfax examines him with a judicial eye, but fails to detect a sign of guilt. He bears her scrutiny without so much as a blink.

"To the gardens only, to get some roses for dinner."

"Better take me with you. If you are going to make a descent on the Maréchal Niels there is no knowing what may happen. McFarlane is capable of murder where they are concerned."

"You can come, if you like," says she, indifferently

## CHAPTER VI.

## A TOUCH OF JEALOUSY.

"Thou troublest me: I am not in the vein."

He accepts the ungracious permission and together they stroll towards the glass-houses, where McFarlane's famous roses are still in all their glory, though autumn is close upon us. Something the girl had said to him a moment ago about them and dinner is now rankling in Dalrymple's mind, and presently, after a firm, inward resolution to die rather than approach either of those subjects, he turns abruptly to her and asks the one question that of all others he had forbidden himself:

"Who is dining here to-night?"

"The Maxwells, the Moores, Sir John Amory, and Lord Dartford."

"*Dartford!* I thought he was not to return until September."

"He has come, nevertheless. He arrived last night. I told grandpapa about it, and he desired me to send him a card."

"If he only arrived last night:—How did you send him a card?"

"This morning, of course, and had an acceptance this afternoon. Anything strange about it?" with a saucy little glance from under her long lashes at his frowning face.

"Rather more than strange, I think. For instance; if he only came last night, how did you know he was in the country?"

"Why, that is the simplest part of it all. He wrote me word of his intended return last week. From Paris he wrote, I think."

"You correspond, then!" His face is white now, and there is a curious expression on his lips. "Does your grandfather know that too?"

"I don't know," nonchalantly, "I daresay not. You can tell him."

Colonel Dalrymple catching her by her arm, swings her lightly round so as to face him.

"Once for all," says he, "you are a girl, I know, and I am a man, but understand at once that you shall not insult me."

"What a temper you are in," says she, shaking herself free of him, with a little rapid movement, "and all because you lost that game at tennis."

"If that was all the loss I am ever to endure!" says he in a voice now low, and subdued, but very sad. He seems ashamed of his late violence.

"Still, you didn't like it," says she. "You *hated* having to play with me, for one thing, because you know I am uncertain with my balls. Yes; I quite un-

decided where the truth is, and that she will  
called her to tell her that she is wrong and  
wrong. But what is the matter with Mary?

"I really don't know," says she slowly, "I don't  
know."

"However, well, the fact remains, the fact remains  
the fact remains," says she with a sudden change of  
"If you had been a little more like Mary, you would have been  
a thought. But that I think is all that Mary  
Dick is a person—the fact is that Mary has been more  
gracious than to show others what she has thought  
me."

"But I don't know that."

"Well, I don't know it, but I know I know  
Mary plays beautifully, and that I am very interested in  
her in every way. But there is a certain amount of  
courage, that—I think," says she quickly, "perhaps  
at least a little ashamed of using her best friend as a  
medium for her desire to torment her cousin." "I think  
Mary is the sweetest thing alive."

"Miss Sykes is charming, as all the world knows,"  
says Dabryne with warmth. The warmth has its  
principal source from the anger that is still burning  
hot within him: and it is so pronounced that involun-  
tarily Nell turns her eyes to his. It is not the answer  
she had expected, and somehow—for a moment it  
startles her. How, or why, she could not have ex-  
plained.

"Yes, all the world," says she slowly, "and now."

"It is a matter of no importance to her," says Dalrymple; "but she certainly stands very high in my estimation."

"When she marries," says Nell, still staring at him, "I shall lose my best friend."

"I hardly see that," says he, "but if you do lose her, she will be, I should think, a real loss to you."

"You admire her very much," says she slowly, yet with vehemence.

"As I have said," shortly.

"Well! You can't marry *her* either!" cries she, with all the careless anger of a spoiled child. "Because she is going to marry John Amory!"

"Nell!" says Colonel Dalrymple sharply, as if shocked, as indeed he well might be. "Don't speak to me like that." He lays his hands upon her shoulders, and presses her back from him, and as she thus looks into his eyes, something in them should have touched her—but it doesn't. "I have no desire to marry Miss Sylvester, or anyone—unless——"

"Ah! there we are equal," interrupts she quickly, not heeding the end there might be to his sentence. "That's just how *I* feel. We are companions in this one thing at least. *I* don't want to marry anyone either."

"Don't you?" says he. "Well, but *I* do; so we are not such close companions as you thought. And, yet, all my desire lies that way. For, as you are tired of hearing no doubt, I would be your companion always.'

"Don't make me *quite* hate you," says she, with a fierce little wrench that leaves her free of his grasp.

Dalrymple, as though effectually silenced, walks on beside her without a word. It seems to him, that if he was ever so eager to pursue the argument, no language is left him in which to do it. She has killed within him all spontaneous thought. A dreadful chill seems to have fallen into the heat of the summer day, and, indeed, as he looks round him in a half-hearted fashion, it occurs to him that day is gone, and evening is already here. The warmth, the vigour of life, has faded, only the ashes of it now remain. And so with his life.

As if in passionate protest against this mournful decree, he throws up his head, and compels himself to enter once again into conversation with the wilful beauty, walking in stubborn silence by his side. He will talk generalities to her—anything—everything—if only to show her that he is not altogether slain by her bow and spear.

"Warm day," says he, making this brilliant remark with all the force that it requires.

"Warm evening," corrects she sweetly.

"Dull in the country, isn't it?"

"*Is* it?"

"Seems absurd the monotony, after the incessant change of town."

"I'm afraid you are very unhappy. Why stay here?"



I am sure grandpapa will excuse you if you wish to return to the sweet shady side of Pall Mall."

"Oh no, thanks; my solicitude was all for you. As for me, I like monotony—and all the rest of it."

"Am *I* the rest of it?" She laughs provokingly as she says this, and plucking a flower next her, holds it up before him, and then second by second advances it, until it is right under his nose. "You are cross," says she, with a tilt of her chin; "and with *me*. Give it up. What good will it do you?"

"None. *None*," says Dalrymple, with an inward groan and much conviction. "Why I let you triumph over me as you do, I can't imagine. But what I *can* imagine is, the folly of your caring for so cheap a victory. Why not let me go?"

"Good heavens! One would think I was holding on to your coat-tails," says the spoiled child, with a little laugh. "I'm *not*, anyway. You can go, when and where you please."

"Is that man going to play your accompaniments to-night?" asks Dalrymple abruptly.

"What man?"

"You know very well—Dartford."

"I *don't* know him very well, as it happens. But—yes—I daresay he will."

"You must know him uncommonly well to be on letter-writing terms with him."

"What an extraordinary sentence! 'Letter-writing

terms!' Why not say 'as you correspond with him'?—so much prettier!"

"You are clever at evading an accusation," he says, with a sneer.

"And who attempts to accuse me?" demands she, hotly, stung by his tone. "You? And why, then? Where lies your claim?"

"I am your cousin, at all events. After your grandfather your nearest relative. I have no intention of standing idly by and seeing you make a fool of yourself."

"Really, Noel," says she as calmly as possible, although she is positively choking with indignation; "permit me to say that you go sometimes a *little* too far. There is a line that *must* be drawn. A joke is a joke, and I presume you were attempting one when you called me a fool, but one can be sometimes *too* funny."

"It was no joke," gloomily.

Somehow this reply, which should have increased her anger, touches in an odd way her versatile nature, and compels her to laughter.

"It was not, indeed," says she, giving way to mirth. "Well, don't do it again, that's all, or I shan't let you off so easily. Oh, there's McFarlane——"

"Stay, Nell—stay one moment. I don't often ask a favour of you, but—don't let Dartford play your accompaniments to-night."

"And if I say 'yes,' who *will* play them—will *you*?"

"You know I can't," says the young man, reproachfully.

"You know what *you* would have," says she, disdainfully. "You would have me give up music altogether. You hate that precious violin of mine. You would break it into a thousand pieces if you dared. Come; deny all that if you can."

"I can't," says he slowly. In truth, wise and able man as he is, he would gladly wreak his vengeance on that harmless instrument. Not even Dartford—though latterly he has begun to think of him with deep suspicion—is so dangerous a rival in the path that leads to the heart of this capricious maiden as the violin she so dearly loves.

"Good boy! Go up one! The truth before a things! Well, you *shan't* demolish it, be sure of that so long as I'm alive. And as for Lord Dartford—beg you won't demolish him either, until I can get a substitute. I don't think he has got an understudy ready, and in himself he is so incomparable that he can't afford to let him go."

"I see," says Dalrymple, with a strange glance at her. He is evidently on the point of saying something more—a good deal more, but by a supreme effort he controls himself. Presently he says, quite quietly, "like him?"

"Why not? He is a good musician—he stands me."

"*He* understand *you!*" almost violently.

"My playing, at all events. Concede so much to him!"

"I concede nothing to him."

"You are, as I have said, illiberal; you would deprive me of my friends, and of my art. You would leave me—only——"

"What?" defiantly.

"You!" with even greater defiance.

He is silent, staring at her, wondering perhaps a little at her audacity, and a great deal at her beauty. Good Heavens! What an insolent, mischievous, adorable creature; with a heart that might contain so much love, and yet will hold not one small grain for him.

"I confess it would be a poor change," says he at last, in a giving-up sort of tone. "I'm not worth the quarter of it—but," his strength returning to him, "neither is he—not a *half* quarter! A despicable fellow, to whom one should be ashamed to hold out the hand of friendship."

"I saw you shake hands with him at Ascot," says she, mildly.

"A man might go so far, but I cannot bear to think that you should regard him with even the barest civility. It is very hard to speak," says he, desperately; "but if you knew all——"

"If I knew 'all' about everybody, I daresay my acquaintance would be limited."

"That is true, of course. But Dartford is on a worse footing than most. There are people—in your

own set," speaking with difficulty, and feeling how much easier it would be to put her on her guard when he was not so entirely heart and soul her slave, "who has refused to receive him."

"What nonsense! You are imagining evil against him. Why, he was the most petted guest at the Darr Staines last autumn."

"Ah, but those girls are so old—and, of course, they have money."

"It doesn't seem to cover his sins," with a slight little laugh.

"He hasn't enough for that. It would take Croesus to live down his reputation."

"He talks very kindly of you when he talks of you at all," says Nell, gently.

Having delivered this stinging little compliment she moves on more briskly, and coming up with Farlane, dismisses Dalrymple with a cool nod, and carries off the old Scotchman in triumph to the Red House.

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## CHAPTER VII.

## A FRESH ELEMENT.

"Amid the golden gifts which Heaven  
Has left, like portions of its light, on earth  
None hath such influence as music hath."

THE room is rapt in a soft silence: the old man, Lord Carbyne, is drawing in deep long sighs of contentment; great savage as he is to his domestics and those dearest to him, music hath charms to soothe his breast—and beyond all other music, that of his grandchild. She is now standing beside the piano in a careless unstudied attitude, with a pretty flush upon her cheeks, and, at all events, part of her heart in the sweet strains she is drawing from her violin. Now, most sad, most mournful they run, and now, wild with glad mirth, and now again, filled with a martial meaning, that stirs the souls of those who listen.

Yet to Dalrymple, who has made her a study, unconsciously, for the past twelve months, it is plain that she is but coquetting with her violin; making use of it, as it were, to get through the present movement, with a view to another movement further on, rich in promise. His jealousy but too plainly points to Dartford as the one who is to bring that promise to perfection.

And presently, even as he is brooding unhappily over this suspicion, the music comes to an end, and Miss Fairfax, with a pretty word or two of thanks to the pale young man who had very inefficiently accompanied her on the piano, and an ill-suppressed sigh of relief, moves lightly across the room to where Mary Sylvester is sitting beside a very lean young woman got up like a mediæval saint. This latter she has indeed managed to acquire for public occasions an expression not to be matched for melancholy resignation and is now shaking her short, tangled, flaming locks in Miss Sylvester's rather bored face. Eleanor bearing down upon her, drops on one knee beside the saint and most irreverently chucks her under the chin.

"What's the latest craze, Sally?" asks she, gaily.

"Oh, not Sally, dearest, I implore," cries Mrs. Mountby-Maugre with a despairing moan. "Sarai—that beautiful old name. Not, *not* that terrible——"

She appears on the point of fainting, and gropes blindly for the vinaigrette that hangs by a long silver chain from her girdle.

"Why, it was Sarah last month," says Eleanor, unfeelingly.

"A month! What an eternity may lie in a month!" breathes Mrs. Mountby-Maugre. "How you talk of time! *Precious* Time! How much may not be accomplished in thirty-one days."

"A good deal, certainly," says Eleanor, springing

et, with all the adorable elasticity of youth. enabled you to get christened all over again!" body laughs as she says this, and turning her slyly she finds Lord Dartford at her elbow: spare man, with a dark complexion, heavy eye and light grey eyes. A man outwardly plain and inwardly dingy to a degree. Not vulgarly plain in appearance, but unmistakably so far all round: an excellent musician; a good talker; ever with a well-timed word upon his lips, or a jest, becoming otherwise as his company shifts itself; without a false heart, and no character whatsoever.

He is notoriously *éprié* about Miss Fairfax, who is now accepted by his set. Where she goes, he goes, as often as is practicable,—throwing himself into her path on all occasions. To the girl herself, he is more than a most excellent interpreter of her compositions, and an invaluable ally when she needs one to aid her in her musical triumphs. To the man of the world, accustomed to take things as they come, the *naïve* pleasure she displays in his music has but one meaning, that she has given to him the heart's first love, and is pining to receive from her the assurance that the battered and hideous thing of what he is pleased to call *his* love has been laid before her, to pick up, and cherish in his secret bosom.

"You are cruel!" whispers he to her now, drawing her a little away from the affronted saint, who



has now conjured up a martyred air. "And not only to her." This with distinct meaning; but Miss Fairfax misses it.

"No, to myself also. Could anything be more murderous than the way Mr. Morgan treated that last *scherzo*? It was horrible! Yet I endured—I lived. I am now talking to *you*!"

There is nothing beyond a pretty compliment to his superior powers as accompanist conveyed in these last words; but Dartford, who has been a good deal spoiled by a certain class of women, mistakes her.

"Do you think I am not sensible of *that*," says he with considerable *empressement* and an earnest look that has done considerable service off and on. Miss Fairfax stares at him, and then, as if a little uncertain as to his meaning, but charitably supposing that it is not nonsense, but an absurdly humbly tribute to her genius that has actuated the enigmatical reply, says kindly:

"Well, it's very good of you, I'm sure."

"Eh? What?" says he, pausing, as one might who is partly deaf, and has failed to comprehend. If he had been enigmatical to her, she has been doubly so to him!

"You are very good, too good," persists she, secure in her own reading, and feeling so ashamed of such praise from a man who really understands music. After all! What is she?

The world has yet to prove her a genius, or merely talented.

"Oh, ay; just so," says Dartford, still at sea; and now with his usual beaming smile that has so little in it. "By Jove! it's the first time I've been told that!"

Somebody coming up to Eleanor at this moment, and touching her arm, she impatiently turns to her right. Dalrymple, his face rather paler and sterner than usual, is standing beside her.

"Mrs. Maxwell is so anxious to hear Lord Dartford sing, that your grandfather has sent me to you, to—to ask him to do so."

There is something in the grave reproach that is so very near to anger in his eyes that enrages Miss Fairfax; she gives him but curt reply.

"Certainly," she says. "He is so kind, so agreeable *always*, that I am sure he will not refuse."

She turns a cold glance from Dalrymple to let a beaming smile fall on Dartford.

"Have you heard?" she says. "Mrs. Maxwell will be unhappy until you have sung to her. Go. Put her out of pain. Sing to her."

"Not to her, to you," says he, softly—so low that Dalrymple cannot hear the words, but can mark the loverlike look and attitude, and can feel the pang that contracts his heart.

"It is a compliment!" says Eleanor prettily, but utterly without sentiment, and presently Dartford's

well-cultivated voice is sounding through the room. He has chosen a quaint little love-song, as simple as possible, and into the last verse he throws as much devotion as he dares, hoping Eleanor will accept it for herself.

“So that our hearts be one,  
So that our love be true,  
The world may laugh or frown  
For me and you.  
Men may be wise or fools,  
Stars may die out above,  
We ask of life no gift  
But love—but love!”

It is a distinctly passionate little effort on Dartford's part, but, unfortunately, Mrs. Maxwell, a little, light-headed, half-pretty woman of thirty-five or so, who has a passing *tendresse* for him, and who had asked him to sing, takes the devotion, the words, the subdued passion, entirely as her own.

“What a heavenly song!” says she, waylaying him as he rises from the piano, and bending forward, in a little fashion of her own, to glance up at him from under her lashes. “And how true! Oh,” rapturously “love, *love!*”

“LOVE—that makes the world go round,” says he curtly, making a pretence of filling up her sentence. “That's about as near rubbish, you know, as the make it nowadays. It's money that makes the world revolve. That's the true axis. You take my word for it.”

There is something a little brutal about the man—a little vulgar. Having thus, without regard to the smallest courtesy, “choked off,” as he would himself have said, this woman, with whom he had dallied many an hour and oft, he crosses the room to where his latest fancy sits smiling kindly at old General Maxwell.

“I am telling Miss Fairfax that she has been a little unkind to us to-night,” says the General, looking up at Dartford. “We so seldom have the chance of hearing her divine interpretations of our favourites that she should not grudge us a good deal of her violin when we do meet. And you, Dartford, I have heard you accompany her. It was a treat. Might,” turning gallantly to Eleanor, “an old man plead for such another perfect half-hour to-night?”

“You have a silver tongue, General. What is it I could refuse you?” says Miss Nell sweetly. “Are you i’ the vein, Lord Dartford? Come, then, we will do our best to charm this cleverest, if kindest of critics.” She smiles down at the General, who, in truth, has a fine knowledge of music, and a love for it, passing all others.

Moving across the room beside Lord Dartford, she happens to pass her cousin, and, mindful of his warning of the morning, the malicious sprite that has kept closely at her side all the evening prompts her to throw him a defiant word or two.

"We are going to give you something to d upon," cries she, with radiant sauciness, looking t at him over her shoulder, whilst, with one hand lif she trifles with the amber beads around her n "Something to remember. Don't lose a note. I fe am going to excel myself! Lord Dartford has insp me!"

It is an audacious little speech, and but for the treme childishness that characterises her, might termed bold. It makes her nothing, however, sav *naughty* child. Dalrymple returns her provoking & steadily, with an unsmiling eye. He is worth thousand Dartfords, but, unfortunately, is so much earnest that he gives himself away a good deal, permits her to see only the uncomfortable side of l Beyond the glance, he makes no reply.

"You are so entirely a person to be congratul on every point," says Dartford, as they move on, "one crumpled rose-leaf cannot afflict you greatly. should say that cousin of yours is it."

"How?" says she, with suspicious innocence, lool quickly round.

"Surly beggar, eh?" says Dartford, secure in knowledge that she had given Dalrymple a rather a glance when he had refused to answer her.

"I think I have gathered from him that you are a very intimate friend of his," says she coldly, ann without knowing why. Truly, she tells herself, D

ford, though unrivalled as an accompanist, is a little trying at times, and, of course, it is always in bad taste to abuse one's relations to one's face.

"What shall it be?" says she, looking down at the heap of music on the stand near the piano.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

DALRYMPLE SEES TOO MUCH AND TOO LITTLE.

"This, this has thrown a serpent to my heart  
While it o'erflowed with tenderness, with joy,  
With all the sweetness of exulting love,  
Now nought but gall is there and burning poison."

"WHAT you will," returns he, and presently something is chosen, and melody, such as is not often heard in private life, is swelling the air. Conversation languishes, and though Mrs. Maxwell, who is angry, tries to keep it up, it soon dies away altogether. Everybody gives him and herself a more comfortable shawl into the chair occupied, and prepares to listen with glad heart.

All except Dalrymple! *His* heart seems on fire. To see her there, so thoroughly *bon camarade* of the contemptible libertine, makes his own honest blood boil in his veins. It certainly wouldn't have boiled at all had the "libertine" been talking to any other girl—probably would not have so much as reached a tepid heart—but that he should dare to aspire to Eleanor leaves only one desire—that the good old dark ages were on more here, when to run a fellow-citizen through the body would be accounted as a mere casualty—

necessary hint—a playful reminder that your patience had a limit, and no more.

In truth, it seems to Dalrymple that he cannot bear to look at her, standing there with her violin pressed against her shoulder, though in reality she is as fair a thing as Nature ever made—"a sight to make an old man young."

She is standing a little forward in her white gown, with one hand and arm raised. Her small haughty head is thrown a little backwards—and sideways—as if naturally inclining towards the beloved instrument. The lovely pearls around her neck gleam and rise and fall with each soft breath she draws, emitting tiny scintillating sparks of light. She is playing now at last with a *verve*, an *abandon* that thrills the hearers and betrays the genius that is hers; music's own soul, without which it knows no real life.

Her playing is remarkable, even in an age where one insists on perfection or nothing; and her companion does her justice. Dartford indeed expresses himself not only with force but with feeling. Strange anomaly in a man to whom heart is unknown. He accompanies her indeed with such taste, with such sympathy, that one might readily believe that at least the *shadow* of his pretty companion's mantle has fallen upon him.

Having begun, and ravished the ear with Rubinstein, they pass on to lighter, more frivolous themes, and at last Eleanor, as if stung by Dalrymple's late censorious glance to a thoroughly childish display of recklessness,



passes into a movement low, seductive, entrancing, the very food of love. She has selected it out of pique, regardless of consequences, and ignorant of Dartford's feelings towards her. It is unmistakably a love song, of the passionate Portuguese type, and exquisitely rendered as it is, holds the room spell-bound.

Then follow some charming bits from Wagner; something of Eleanor's genius seems to have entered into Dartford, because he plays now, as he never played before, with a spirit, a *brio* hardly to be rivalled. Into his touch, too, he has thrown that suspicion of maliciousness that has actuated Eleanor all through, it is as though he had caught it from her.

And now it is over, the last long-drawn note has sounded, and silence, too poverty-stricken, succeeds. Eleanor lays aside her violin in a little abrupt way, and with shining eyes and faintly flushed cheeks moves amongst her guests. There is a suggestion of triumph—but triumph *unsatisfied*—in her whole air. To Dalrymple, still watching her, it appears as if she disdains the compliments pressed upon her, and pines for a larger ground. After a vague word, or vaguer smile, to those who insist on laying their homage at her feet, she turns aside and says a word or two to Dartford, as though he alone really can understand or appreciate. As a fact, she is so far artist at heart, that praise from the outsiders—the uninitiated—is as nothing to her, and she is too young, too untutored, to pretend a gratitude she cannot feel. In Dartford, who is really a

musician — whatever else he may be — lies her sole interest for the moment. He has been the sharer of her victory, the partner of her success—small though he *counts* it; and, as such is given for the time being a high place in her favour.

That Dartford should misunderstand the position is inevitable. Accustomed to be smiled on by women, he accepts Eleanor's brilliant glances as distinct encouragement, and having finally decided on ranging himself, and giving to her the joyous task of reforming the duke, decides on making her a formal proposal before the night is over.

Together he and she pass through the rooms to the conservatory beyond. She, impatiently anxious to escape the laudations she scorns with all youth's intolerance; and he, eager for the moment when he shall hear the pretty "yes" that will put an end to his rather disreputable bachelorhood.

It is half an hour later. A century, as it has seemed to Dalrymple—who is consumed with jealousy. A good long hour to Mrs. Maxwell—who is secretly furious at Dartford's defection, and eager for an occasion to be evened upon her rival—as she has grown to regard the unconscious Eleanor; some ground indeed for her suspicion has been given her by the fact that since Miss Fairfax and Lord Dartford entered the conservatory thirty minutes ago, they have been lost to any other society but their own. Such a flagrant breach of manners on the part of her hostess deserves, in Mrs. Max-

well's opinion, instant punishment, and so with a rather nasty little smile she now rises, and sweeps down upon Lord Carbyne, making her adieus in a very determined fashion. It is still distinctly early, but that she has refused to consider it so, is evident.

"Yes; it grows chilly, you know, and the General's throat is always *so* troublesome. No—*no—please*, do not disturb Miss Fairfax. You will say good night to me for her, will you not? I feel sure she must have good reason for depriving us of her society for the past hour, and I would not for worlds be the cause of ——. Now, I *beg* you will let me steal away without compelling her to do the usual thing. I *adore* unconventional people myself, they are so satisfying. One never knows what they are going to do next. *Good night.*"

"One moment," says Lord Carbyne, in his coldest haughtiest tone; "Noel," to Dalrymple who is standing near, and who is regarding Mrs. Maxwell's little smiling face with ill-suppressed anger; "tell Eleanor to come at once and bid Mrs. Maxwell good night; you will excuse her, I am sure," with a courteous, if rather forced, smile to Mrs. Maxwell. "When she gets on the subject of music, she forgets all things."

("Even her manners") is on Mrs. Maxwell's flip pant tongue, but she reserves it, and, satisfied with having brought the attention of the entire room to the fact that Miss Fairfax has been for the past half-hour *tête-à-tête* with a man of Dartford's reputation, and so

charmed with him as to be forgetful of even the most correct etiquette, subsides into a lounging chair before her host, and consents to let the General's throat be its chance.

Dalrymple, making his way into the smaller conservatory that leads into the larger one beyond, and finding Eleanor there, pushes aside the heavy curtain that divides the two rooms, and advances boldly.

Tall, flowering shrubs stand here and there, behind which cushioned lounges have been arranged. On one of these, at the farthest end of the conservatory, a slender figure gowned in white, is seated—the lace trims of her dress gleaming like snow against the dark background of myrtle-leaves.

It is Eleanor. She is hardly seated indeed. She is half risen—one hand pressing against the arm of the lounge—her attitude suggestive of sudden surprise, her face uplifted to Dartford, who is bending towards her—an impassioned glance within his eyes.

Something—he never knew what—compels Dalrymple to stand still, as his eyes light upon this beautiful creature. He is too far away to note the glance in Dartford's eyes, to read the expression in Eleanor's. It is an instant's halt, but long enough to work a world of mischief. Even as he gazes, Dartford stoops swiftly forwards, his arm goes round Eleanor's slight form, his head bends towards hers—he —.

It is all over in a second. As though shot to the

heart, Dalrymple turns on his heel, lifts the curtain and stands outside it once again, his pulses beating to a suffocating degree, his face like death. He had feared—but he had never quite believed—until now! The end had come too abruptly.

And that she—she——. That *any* woman should permit the embrace of a man like Dartford, seems horrible to him—but that it should be Eleanor! that *child*! Great Heaven! is there nothing in the whole wide world that one can be *sure* of! To *her* innocence, her pride, he could have sworn, and now, what is left him? She had seemed the very incarnation of happy, capricious, guileless youth—yet here she is carrying on a vulgar flirtation with a man whom the best people look on with unfriendly eyes.

Then all at once it occurs to him that, perhaps, Dartford had just proposed to her, and had been accepted. Cruel as this thought is, it yet comes to him as a very heaven-sent hope, after his first great shock. To be able to preserve his faith in her is dearer to him now than anything life has left to give.

He draws a long breath, and, lifting his hand to his forehead, pushes back his hair. With action, memory returns, and the knowledge that he cannot go back to the drawing-room without her. Curiosity—already a little on the alert—must be satisfied at once, and any further gossip about his cousin put an end to. He would have given a good part of his income to escape the ordeal before him, but, without a second's hesita-

tion, he again puts aside the curtain, and advances with resounding steps down the tessellated pavement to where he had seen her sitting.

"Eleanor!" calls he, in a loud voice. He cannot bring himself to look in her direction, however, or he could hardly have failed to notice the crimson cheeks and flashing eyes, and general air of indignation that distinguishes her. She is standing, looking almost tall, for her, whilst Dartford, lowering and sullen, is holding back from her, a look of angry resentment on his dark face.

"Mrs. Maxwell is going—she wishes to say good night to you—your grandfather sent me to find you," says Dalrymple, in a deplorably jerky style, always with his eyes upon the ground.

He turns away abruptly as he finishes his message, without a single glance at her. He had not heeded the little eager run she had made towards him, as if hoping to find in him a protector—a shelter from some trouble that has beset her. Checked in this hope, she stops herself—and follows him, slowly, thoughtfully, *resentfully*—to her grandfather's presence.

Here she apologizes very sweetly to Mrs. Maxwell, who says two or three unpleasant things to her in the gayest manner possible, and with the archest of glances from under the effective lashes, and thereafter takes herself and her General away. And presently all the other guests follow her example. And Lord Carbyne, after a word or two of censure to Eleanor, who hardly

hears him, is carried off to bed by his valet, and she is left standing in the big empty room, full of her own thoughts—that are hardly agreeable.

With a little sigh, she rouses herself, and, with a determination to seek forgetfulness in sleep, is moving towards the door, when a voice behind her startles her:

“Do not go yet, Eleanor, I wish to speak to you.”

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## CHAPTER IX.

## MISS FAIRFAX MAKES UP HER MIND.

"Who should be trusted now, when one's right hand  
Is perjured to the bosom? Proteus,  
I am sorry I must never trust thee more,  
But count the world a stranger for thy sake—  
The private wound is deepest."

COLONEL DALRYMPLE'S tone is harsh, and unmusical; there is displeasure in his whole air. There is misery, too, and even pain; but the girl, looking back at him, sees only the displeasure. He is standing in the open window that leads on to the balcony, and had evidently been walking up and down there whilst the last guests were taking their departure.

"Grandpapa has done your duty for you. I've had my scolding," says Nelly, still looking at him over her shoulder with the odd sort of angry contempt she usually shows him. "I know it by heart now; I've learned my lesson. Listen. I'm a shocking hostess. I've been barbarously rude. Mrs. Maxwell said (very deservedly) some terribly uncivil things about me. I have no sense of decency. Nature has made one more grand mistake; she has picked up a wretched little *bourgeoise* and flung her into the midst of the aristo-



crazy. He said a good deal more that I didn't hear. But that's enough, isn't it?"

"It is on quite another matter I wish to speak to you," says Dalrymple coldly.

"You will wait until to-morrow, then," says she, shrugging her shoulders, and making a step or two towards the door.

"Not for an hour! Not for one minute!" says he with passion, coming up to her and laying his hand upon her arm.

"*Noel!*" exclaims she, in a low tone. She shakes his hand from her arm, and glances at him with gleaming eyes. For a minute they regard each other steadily, both faces angry, defiant, and then he speaks.

"I saw you in the conservatory with Dartford, to-night. I will have an explanation about that," says he, his mouth set.

For a moment he fears she is going to faint. Her lips grow white, her eyes large. Then she masters herself.

"Well?" she says, with a short, uncertain laugh.

His heart dies within him. This is not the attitude a freshly-engaged girl would have taken. There is no shrinking, no pretty blush; there is defiance rather, and *shame* in the lovely, youthful eyes.

"I saw you," says he again, in a dull sort of way.

"And what did you see?" cries she fiercely. "You talk, and talk, and say nothing."

"You know what I saw."

"I do not, indeed."

"If you will have it, then," says he violently, "I saw him kiss you."

Just for the instant it occurs to Dalrymple that she is on the point of striking him with her small, clenched hand. But once again she subdues herself, and grinds the little doubled fingers into the palm of the other hand, and so stands staring at him, silent, but breathing very quickly.

"You do not deny it," says he, his last hope dead.

"Deny what you *saw*! How could I?" says she. And then, suddenly, she bursts out laughing—a little peal of laughter, wild indeed, but without merriment.

"Come, if you must tell me your experiences, let us go where there is air," she says, pressing her hand against her throat. "I cannot breathe here." She passes him and steps hurriedly through the window on to the balcony, and, leaning against the rails as if glad of their support, drinks in greedily the sweet, soft, night air, heavy with the perfumes of the sleeping flowers beneath.

The sky is bright with stars, and in their midst a crescent moon hangs lightly. Eleanor, after a quick glance at it, turns her gaze with an impatient gesture to the dense gloom of the dark pines upon her right, that look like a dark blot upon the already gloomy blackness of the woods around.

"Are you engaged to Dartford?" asks Dalrymple sternly. He has followed her and is now trying vainly

to read her face in the uncertain light cast upon it by the faint beams thrown by the half-grown moon.

"No," impulsively.

"*No!* And yet——. He proposed to you?"

No answer.

"Not even that," says he bitterly. "Why, it is a sorry tale. It would have been bad enough if he had made you an honourable offer of his hand; but as it is——"

"Do you know," says she, turning to him, and speaking very slowly, "that it is *horrible* to hate anyone as I hate you?"

"Oh, never mind me," says he. "It is not a question of me. It is of *you* I am thinking. This sort of thing must be put a stop to. It *shall* be stopped. You are only a child after all, and, perhaps, no one has taken you to heart sufficiently. How are *you* to know a good man from a bad one, or the right or wrong of anything? I tell you this," says he, as if warning her. "I shall put an end to your acquaintance with Dartford. You shall find some one else to accompany you when you choose to play your violin. I shall inform your grandfather to-morrow of what sort of man this Dartford is."

"You can tell him what you like. You will speak too late. You should have done it before." Is there reproach in her tone?

"You mean by that?——"

"That all you can say now will make no difference."

"What do you mean, Eleanor?" demands he roughly.

"Exactly what I say."

"We shall see," says Dalrymple. "If you insist on believing you feel an affection for that—that fellow, I am sorry for you, as I shall certainly take measures to prevent your having anything further to do with him."

"You will be giving yourself useless trouble."

"I am to understand by that, I suppose, that you defy me?"

"You can understand anything you like, so far as I am concerned, but, after all, I did not mean that!"

"Then *what*? I wish you would explain yourself."

"Why, that is too much to expect," says she, with an unmirthful laugh. "That I should supply the riddle and the answer too. No, no; find out the latter for yourself."

"You have some thought, some plan formed, which you hope to keep from me," says Dalrymple with a poor attempt at calmness. "But do not hope to deceive me. I am your nearest relative after your grandfather, and I shall see that no harm comes to you."

"You needn't lose your temper over me, at all events," says she, with a provoking intonation—half mockery, half contempt—that fires his blood. "You make yourself very ridiculous, I must say, when you let yourself go, as you are doing to-night. What is all this rhodomontade about? I know grandpapa has given us to each other ever since I was born; but there is

really very little in that! I am nothing to you, and you (believe me) are less to me. In spite of grand-papa's perpetual nagging, you are not *bound* to marry me."

"To marry you—*you!* after what I saw to-night! *Never!*" says Dalrymple, a very passion of disdain and rage making his voice ring. He has turned so as to face her more directly, and has thrown out one hand as if to give emphasis to his decision. A dead silence follows. Miss Fairfax, as though changed into marble, stands motionless, gazing back at him through the luminous darkness—not trying to read his expression, or seeking to take his words to heart, but merely as one might whose power of thought has suddenly been killed, and who has no further knowledge of anything. A numb state, scarcely hurtful at the moment, but rich in promise of misery to come. The silence is a long one, and gives to Dalrymple sufficient time to wonder if his speech has been all it ought to be. She is not usually so quiet when angered, and angered she must most certainly have been. Has he hurt her? A curious sense of satisfaction, of delight in this thought, is mingled with a sincere regret. Fear indeed is taking hold of him, under the uncomfortable charm of this deadly calm, when at last Miss Fairfax breaks it.

"That simplifies everything," she says, in an ordinary way, if a little sternly. After all, he tells himself, he had had no power to hurt her. He is now, as he has ever been, nothing to her. Less than nothing, as

she herself had said a minute or two ago. The fear and regret die, and judicial anger once more takes their place.

"When one comes to think of it," says she, speaking again, as one might who has been summing up a case, and has come to a safe conclusion on it, "I have done you a good turn; you should be grateful. You did not wish to quarrel with grandpapa, and *he* wished you to marry me. As you threatened me awhile since, you will to-morrow tell him of all the terrible things you know about Lord Dartford, and—and of my—what did you call it?—improper conduct will do very well, at all events, and exactly suits the exigencies of the case. Well—there you are! Grandpapa is useful, and he will not quarrel with *you*, he will only quarrel with me, and you will get out of a detested semi-engagement without offending the suggester of it."

"You can make me out as great a sneak as you like," says Dalrymple, "but that will give you little satisfaction when your own mind belies you. You know I shall not mention *your* name to Lord Carbyne. There is, too, one other error in your speech. That semi-engagement was not detestable to me. But I am not a fool. So long as you cared for no other man, I endured the thought that you did not care for me. But when I saw you encourage Dartford as you did to-night—when I saw you——."

"Be silent!" cries the girl fiercely; checking him by the vehemence of her voice and gesture. "Not

another word. You have said enough! Too much!" She stands back from him; her hands pressed against her bosom. If he had struck her, she could not have looked more enraged. Then suddenly her lovely naked arms fall to her sides, she throws up her head, and without another glance at him, sweeps past, and hurries to her own room.

Once there she gives thought full sway. And one especial thought, that for weeks has been troubling, delighting, enticing her. Going to a drawer in one of her tables, she opens it, and takes out a card. It had been given to her by Barbour, the night of Lady Swansdown's At home, and had been kept ever since, she scarcely knew why.

She had been drawn to the popular actor—the born artist—in a strange way. He had interested her. He had complimented her, and there had been that in his words, so undeniably sincere and earnest, that she, who shrunk from praise, had accepted his, and felt pleasure in it. He had appealed to the kindred artist soul in her, and had found his echo there; she had indeed answered him back. He had hinted great things to her, and had been honestly and openly sorry that Fate had not so ordered her affairs that she should not have to work for her daily bread. He had cried aloud to her the glories of a universal conquest—the gathering of many people at her feet. He had assured her that she had but to speak—that is to let her violin speak, and the renown of which she had read and dreamed

and longed for, would be hers. An enthusiast himself, he had lit on another only ready to be kindled at his touch, and had set her soul aflame! Oh! to be amongst the great ones of this world. To know, to feel, to see, the adulation of the crowd!

It could scarcely be said that he had put in her mind the desire to place her talent before the public and to live or die by its decision, because ever since her tiny child's fingers had drawn bow across the strings she had vaguely longed for the moment when she should, or at least might be, famous. It was her night dream as well as her best waking thought through all her earlier years, and of late—within the last twelve months, it had become a passion with her. Feeling the genius that undoubtedly stirred within her, she pined, as all true artists must do, to put it to the test; to hear the world's judgment on her best—to sink beneath their hisses or to swim to shore amidst the tumult of their applause.

Yet Barbour had certainly been a direct agent towards the course she had now at last elected to pursue. He had opened the way for her. He had in his kindly, enthusiastic Bohemian way assured her that when Fate proved too strong for her, and genius uplifted her beyond the carnal longings for comfort and social triumphs that surrounded her and hampered her—when art, and art alone was acknowledged by her as the supreme king and conqueror of all, *then*, if she came to him, he would be not only willing, but able to place



her in that path that alone gives solace to the unwilling wanderer upon this earth.

He always talked a good deal of nonsense, but on the whole Barbour was, if anything, a man of business, and though saturated with the belief that everything should give way to genius, always knew what genius really was, and passed over the spurious specimens with a kindly word or two indeed, but with a distinct refusal to have anything to do with them. Miss Fairfax's violin had taken him by storm. He had waxed eloquent over it, and having succeeded in gaining an introduction to the owner of it, had said to her many things that her friends would have wished unsaid. But to Barbour, the adorer of genius, it was impossible to hear such music and refrain from advocating his creed. To him, to have the divine fire and refuse to lay it at the world's feet, was to be unworthy of the gift.

Eleanor, throwing herself into an arm-chair beneath a lamp, gazes long and earnestly at the card.

Here is Barbour's name, address, and—unwritten—all his golden promises. The world is before her, with its honeyed praise, its adulation, and the splendid triumphs that others have achieved. All this before her, if she choose—and what behind?

Mary Sylvester is going to be married. *She* will not miss her. And, indeed, who will? Not grand-papa. *He* is always at feud with her more or less. He has threatened to cast her off, to disinherit her unless——

She gets up suddenly here, and brings her pretty white teeth with a sharp click together. After all, grandpapa need not have been so hard on her—she, evidently, was not the *only* one averse to the marriage he has at heart. Oh! that she could be even with Noel some time or other; that she could only give him back insult for insult. He who had *dared* to believe her capable of kissing a man to whom she was neither engaged, nor likely to be; a man whom now she holds in deepest hatred and contempt. What malignant god laid hands on Noel and pushed him into the conservatory just at *that* moment, and not a second later, when she had with angry indignation repulsed Dartford, and refused his offer of his name and fortune in words that admitted of no doubt. How ready he (Noel) had been to believe the worst of her. Yes, she will go, to try her fortune with the world. To *him* it will be a relief to get rid of her, and to herself—well, Glory is a gracious partner; what other need she seek. And if grandpapa is going to disinherit her for one thing, why, he may just as well do it for another. And to be free, and famous——

\* \* \* \* \*

Colonel Dalrymple, whose night has been passed in a remorseful review of his own conduct during that last conversation with his cousin, has come down to breakfast in a distinctly penitential mood, eager to cry *mea culpa*, and throw himself metaphorically at her feet with a view to gaining pardon for all the harsh things

said to her. Hope, indeed, was at an end for him, but, after all, who was he that he should smite her; and if she *had* erred, what was she but a child? He had been brutal to her; he would make amends for that, at all events. He would demand her pardon for the high tone he had taken, and try, if possible, to re-establish between them the old friendship, which, if of a rather warlike kind, was, at least, better than nothing.

But his desire to abase himself before her receives a check. Miss Fairfax does not grace the breakfast-table. The chair behind the big urn, sacred to her, remains untenanted, until a servant having said that Miss Fairfax had gone for an early walk, and her early walks meaning a re-appearance only at luncheon, Miss Sylvester kindly, if very inefficiently (according to Colonel Dalrymple), consents to pour out the tea, now deplorably out of condition through long-standing.

But luncheon comes, and still no opportunity is given to Dalrymple to make his peace with his small hostess. If she had outraged all the laws of hospitality last night by absenting herself from her guests, she is behaving in doubly bad fashion to-day. Luncheon is discussed in dead silence, Mary Sylvester, who is returning to town by the afternoon train, feeling rather uneasy, and Dalrymple positively frightened. She, Nelly, has, of course, only gone to some of the people in the neighbourhood, determined to spend her day there, and so punish him for his impertinence (his conduct has by this time come to be regarded by him as something

monstrous), and presently will be home again. But how terribly she has been annoyed, to go to such great extremes. To absolutely absent herself from the house when she *knows* Mary Sylvester is leaving by the three train! Lord Carbyne has asked for her several times, and has been assured by Dalrymple that she will be back in time for dinner. The old man, pining for the violin that has now become an almost indispensable luxury, has sworn a good deal, but presently has consented to be quieted down, waiting for the evening that shall give him his chief joy.

But dinner comes, and yet no Nelly! After a rather strained explanation with Lord Carbyne, Colonel Dalrymple jumps into a dog-cart and takes the nine train to town. In vain, however!

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## CHAPTER X.

## LORD CARBYNE MAKES A CONFESSION.

"Oh coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me."

"For it so falls out  
That what we have we prize not to the worth  
Whiles we enjoy it, but being lack'd and lost,  
Why then we rack the value. Then we find  
The virtue that possession would not show us  
Whiles it was ours."

It is a month later. And as yet no tidings have been heard of Eleanor Fairfax. Lord Carbyne, proud, sensitive, self-contained, has perhaps felt the disgrace of his granddaughter's disappearance in this unaccountable fashion more keenly than the actual loss of her. Immediately on the recognition of the fact that she was in reality *gone*, he had given orders to close his doors to all visitors, and sad at heart, if stubbornly indifferent in feature, had awaited the end of this strange tragedy that had fallen into his life.

Not so Dalrymple. Half maddened at first by the girl's flight and silence, there was still a greater bitterness in store for him, when thought had time to assert itself. With the first news that Dartford, too, had left his home, and gone, no one knew where, his actual

tyrdom began. Having ascertained that on the morning of Nelly's disappearance, his supposed father had also left his home, fear grew into a certainty, with his brain on fire, and his every pulse throbbing; he had followed the latter's movements from London to Dover, from that to Calais, from that still further south, to Italy, to learn there with absolute certainty that Dartford had travelled alone!

The relief was supreme, but yet could not destroy traces that those few terrible days and nights of suspense had laid on Dalrymple. He was never quite the same man again. Not so young for one thing; always with a touch of melancholy about him. It only detracted from his charm, but it was there.

Those words of Eleanor, uttered with so different a meaning, had rankled in his mind and borne him bitter. "You will speak *too late*," and again, "All you say now will make no difference." He had not understood this, filled as he was with one belief. To them they pointed but one way: That she loved Dartford, and that no warning now could change the working of her heart. To her they had meant that all the world in the world could not sever her from Dartford so actually as Dartford's own conduct.

The manner of his proposal in the conservatory; the assured tone of it; his free and easy attempt to seduce her, with the too evident assumption that the seduction would be welcome, had all enraged her be-

yond forgiveness, and turned the very ordinary liking she entertained for him into an intense dislike.

But of all this, Dalrymple was necessarily ignorant, and those few days and nights spent in pursuing Dartford were full of an anguish, rage, and desire for revenge, hardly to be equalled.

And at last when the first, worst, great fear was happily at an end, *what* still remained? Only despair of another kind. The girl could not be found. The cleverest detectives in Scotland Yard were called into requisition, but all to no avail.

"I don't believe in these damned modern police," says Lord Carbyne, leaning back in his chair, with his quilted dressing gown wrapped round his chilly old form. "What can they do? Whom do they find? You can pin your faith to them if you will, Dalrymple, but I confess I've not got your easy-going spirit."

"Detectives are not naturally infallible. You must give them time," says Dalrymple, who has been inwardly cursing them ever since the day of Nelly's flight.

"I've given them a good deal, as it seems to me. No; that child will not come back! Good Heavens, Noel! What a terrible thing to happen to me in my old age."

"It is not so bad for you, as for me," says Dalrymple, with a touch of passion, turning to the old man a pale, agitated face. "You never seem to realize that I loved her. How calmly you say she will never come back. I tell you she *will* come. She *shall*. I——"

"My good fellow, what can you do? *Nothing*. It is all over, Noel, believe me. If she had a spark of feeling for any one of us she would have sent us an anonymous line, long ago; but you see she has sent not so much as a word. She is dead to us. I—" the old man hesitates—"Perhaps I should have told you before, something I said to her a day or two before she left us."

Dalrymple after a sharp glance at him draws nearer.

"It was this," says Carbyne, thrumming nervously upon the table near him, "I told her, if she refused to marry you, that I would—er—disinherit her!"

"You *did*!" says Dalrymple, and then as if afraid to trust himself, he refrains from further speech. That she should have been threatened with *him* as a means of losing home and fortune! It seems too cruel! In what a light has he been placed! *How* must she have regarded him. She, the pretty child, with her quick temper, and her hatred of coercion in any form.

"Yes, yes, I did, I confess that now. I should not have threatened her with disinheritance; I admit that—everything. You need not look at me as though I were guilty of murder. She should have known well that my bark was worse than my bite, and that I would not have cast out into the cold any child of the one son I had."

"It is too late for explanations," says Dalrymple bitterly, untouched by the grief of the old man, by his



sudden allusion to his only child, the son whom he had loved and trusted, and by whom he had been so woefully deceived.

"It is not too late for final arrangements, however," says Carbyne, testily, hurt, though he would rather have died than acknowledge it, by the younger man's want of sympathy. "The title is yours—must come to you. The money shall follow it—*now!* It was to be hers, and I thought to cement title and fortune by a marriage between you two, but she has put an end to all that." He is speaking rather incoherently, and Dalrymple glances at him apprehensively, but the old man rallies out of the weakness into which grief and humiliation have thrown him.

"You hear?" he says, sharply. "A marriage between you and her is all over *now.*"

"Yes, all over," says Dalrymple, coldly.

"She has chosen to cast herself adrift from her family; she shall, therefore, sink or swim by herself. I'm done with her," still beating idly on the table with his finger-tips. "Done with her, I tell you. The money I meant for her shall now be yours. Yes, every penny. Title and estates should join. I leave you all!" flinging out his withered hands as if in repudiation of the girl who has forsaken him.

"I wouldn't touch it if I were dying of starvation," says Dalrymple, passionately. "Good Heavens! you talk of her as if she were dead. She will——"

"She *is* dead."

"She is not. She will come back some day. It is some childish freak of hers. You mistake her, sir. There is great warmth in that strange heart of hers, and though angered now by your threat and my stupidity—" he has long ago told Lord Carbyne of that last angry interview with her, omitting all suspicion of her *tendresse* for Dartford—"the hour will come when we shall hear from her—know through her of her present abode."

"If you can believe *that*, Noel, and still feel kindly towards her, I confess you are not kin to me in thought, at all events," says Lord Carbyne fiercely. "If at this moment she is in good case, and can permit us to endure the torments of suspense to which we are a prey, she is a *fiend* rather than a woman!"

The old man's sudden exhibition of feeling is a revelation to Dalrymple.

"You *care*—so much, then?" he says, staring at Carbyne in a sort of wonderment.

"Care—*care!*" Lord Carbyne raises himself, and, standing erect, looks straight at Dalrymple with a curious expression in his aged eyes. "Hear me, once or all!" says he. "She was the apple of my eye. The last of the old stock—the child of my *one* child! If I was unkind to her, God forgive me. I shall never forgive myself. Noel, I cannot dispossess myself of the belief that she is dead. I dream of her nightly, and always, in whatever attitude I see her, death is on her face."

"Pshaw! dreams are worthless," says Dalrymple, with impatience that savours of fear.

"They may be, yet those 'children of an idle brain' oftentimes come true. I miss her," says he with a mournful turn of his head; "her laughter, her little mutinous ways, her music. She was music itself." He pauses. "I shall not see her again," ends he in a prophetic tone.

Dalrymple is silent. The elder man's manner is so sad, so assured of evil, that it cuts him to the heart, and turns the dread that he has been fighting with all these four long weeks into a terrible certainty.

"You are going up to town to-morrow?" questions Lord Carbyne, presently.

"Yes. Sir John wired to me to meet him at Morley's—some business matter, I think, connected with his coming marriage with Mary Sylvester."

"I thought she had put it off."

"Yes, she is in great distress about Nelly. But of course that sort of thing is folly. The world," bitterly, "cannot stand still because one little girl is missing. Sir John, and all her friends, are persuading her to keep to the original date."

"Right, right," says the old man, yet he looks, if possible, more depressed. "It is so far better a thing that people should feel *with* us, than *for* us!"

"I don't think, however, that Mary *will* be persuaded," says Dalrymple, kindly, who understands him, and the small pang that has pierced his heart.

"Eh? You think not? She is a good girl, a good

irl," says Carbyne, gratefully. "When you see her—  
ay love to her. And tell her," with an effort, "that I  
ent her word to give up waiting. It will do no good—  
none."

"You are in a morbid mood, sir," says Dalrymple.  
'You lose heart in too stubborn a fashion!'"

Yet it is with small heart that he himself meets  
Amory next day; so despondent indeed is his mood,  
that that kindly young man racks his brain with a  
view to finding something that will take him out of  
himself, and compel his thoughts to wander for a while  
from the miserable suspense that is his companion night  
and day.

"You're mine," says he, "for the time being at all  
events, and where I go, there you shall follow me. No  
good to fight against it. My will is law."

"I don't care where I go," says Dalrymple, with  
honest weariness.

"I do," says Amory, frankly, "and I know a real  
good thing that will help us to put in our afternoon,  
at all events. There's a *matinée* at The Elixir, a new  
thing—first appearance—but so well *hinted* of, that it  
is sure to be an outrageous success. Barbour is running  
it, and Mrs. Beecham-Brown is to take the principal  
part. It must have a first-class head and tail to it, or  
he would hardly consent to mix herself up with it, and  
resides, Barbour's a genius. You'll come?"

"If you like," says Dalrymple, supremely indifferent.  
Are we to call for Miss Sylvester *en route*?"

"N—No. Fact is," says Sir John, apologetically, "that Mary and I have had rather a tiff this morning, small thing, you know—mere breeze, and all about poor, dear, little Miss Fairfax. I just happened to say that I was sure she would turn up all right—no harm in that, I'm sure, my dear fellow—but she took it awful bad—said I'd no feeling. Now, I put it to you, Dalrymple—*am* I a brute? D'ye think I don't feel for little Miss Nelly and all of you? I explained a good deal, but she wouldn't listen to me, and kept on declaring she would never marry me until Miss Nelly was found. I didn't mind *that* so much," thrusting his arm into Dalrymple's with a truly handsome desire to comfort him, "because I feel positive Miss Fairfax will be good enough to let us know where she is in a week or so at the farthest."

"I would to Heaven *I* could think so," says Dalrymple, so touched by the other's sympathy as to give way to Nature in a degree.

"It's hard on you, just now, but you'll see it will come right in the long run," says Amory, cordially. "I'm sorry you can't have Mary to cheer you up this afternoon, she is such a good girl—but she—when she felt a little—er—*you know*—annoyed with me—she elected to go to the Elixir with her brother."

"We'll meet there, perhaps, then?"

"Dear fellow! You'll meet all the world there. I tell you society is on the *qui vive* to know all about the new play."

## CHAPTER XI.

## HER FIRST APPEARANCE.

"Her presence was low music. When she went  
She left behind a dreamy discontent,  
As sad as silence when a song is spent."

"How pale she looks!  
And of an earthly cold! Mark you her eyes?"

"DEAD lucky to have got even *these* seats," says Dicky Sylvester, as he and Mary take possession of two in the front row of the dress circle. "Everything else bought up three weeks ago I'm told. You'll be fretting for your stalls."

"Not I," says Mary. "I think for seeing, the first row here is best."

"Good little Mary. *Always* contented!" says her brother, in tones full of admiration, giving her a surreptitious pinch under the pretence of loosening the laces round her throat.

"I'm a dullard!" says Miss Sylvester, with serious self-contempt. "I shouldn't have come here, or *anywhere*, with you. I might have remembered that you don't know how to conduct yourself with the smallest sense of propriety. I can only hope that this new play will afford me some consolation."

"If puffing means anything, it should stir the cockles of even a heart of granite like yours," says her brother. "But I don't believe in puffing, myself. Always stand or fall on your own merits, say I."

At this Miss Sylvester very unkindly gives way to mirth.

"Eh?" says he.

"I'm thinking you'll fall, Dicky," says she.

"Not a bit of it," says he, wriggling in his seat as if to test the merits of *it*. "Unsound as all things are now-a-days, I fancy this apology for a chair will last me till the curtain goes down."

As he speaks it rises, and the first scene is gone through, admirably acted, by some of the first actors of the year, and with sufficient go in the piece itself to almost ensure its success. The first and last scenes are usually the crucial tests; and the beginning here has been undoubtedly good and full of promise. Even Dalrymple sitting in the stalls beside Sir John feels interest in it rising in his breast, so strong that only the downfall of the curtain carries him back with a pang of self-reproach to the one trouble that is ever present with him.

"Bless me there's John Amory in the stalls," says Dicky Sylvester, nudging his sister, who, now the curtain is down, is enjoying herself gazing round and seeing what friends are here, and what at home. "Naughty boy, out by himself!" Miss Sylvester starting a little, and finding herself looking into Amory's eyes

who indeed is incurring a severe crick in his neck in his vain efforts to examine every part of the house at once, in his endeavour to discover her) changes colour perceptibly, to her brother's delight. "What colour is ed, Molly?" asks he. "Never mind, don't answer it. I'll let you off. It's the colour of *you* at all events. And see he has got the disconsolate one beside him. Dalrymple, in the flesh! He's got *your* stall I shouldn't wonder. See how foolish it is to quarrel with people on the eve of a play such as this promises to be."

"I *never* quarrel," replies his sister with dignity. If she has fondly dwelt on the hope of subduing him, she finds herself indeed mistaken.

"Not you!" says he with lively scorn. "Think I forget how you used to grab out my hair in handfuls, all because of the vivisection of a beastly doll or two. There! go to! Don't hope to impose upon *me*. Keep all that sort of thing for Amory. I shan't tell. By-the-by, there's Stanley too, lording it in the stalls, and Weyman, and Mordaunt. There must be a Bank holiday somewhere."

"I really never saw so many men in the stalls before, and so few women," says his sister, glad to turn his thoughts into another channel.

"That's because all the women have gone out for a drink," says Dicky, innocently.

"Really Dicky," says she, indignantly, "I *do* wish you would arrange your conversation properly, when with me. I must beg you will not speak like that."



She is still a little angry with him about that allusion to her quarrel with Amory.

"No!" with mild surprise. "Well, I won't then. The truth, I know, is always hateful. But I thought you were one of the woman-righters or I shouldn't have spoken."

"There's one woman you know, in the theatre at all events," says she resentfully. "Miss Burgess. I see her over there in the second box."

"Do you know, I never *can* see that girl," says Dicky, promptly. "Her teeth are too much for me. They're a lot bigger than *she* is: they're tusks! They hide her from me. If she wouldn't laugh there would be a chance for me, but she laughs all day, and all night, *I'm told*," heavy and severe emphasis on this.

"I don't wish to discuss her," says Miss Sylvester. "I merely mean to say that she at all events," witheringly, "has not 'gone out for a drink,' as you very rudely said a moment ago."

"She couldn't," says Dicky. "Don't you know she's been forbidden! The bar wouldn't stand it. She'd bite bits out of all the tumblers, and that wouldn't pay."

Of this, Miss Sylvester refuses very properly to take any notice. She turns aside her head, and looks contemptuous. This comes easily to her, as she has arranged her expression to meet Amory's imploring one.

The latter catches it and is instantly reduced to despair.

"What's the matter with you now?" asks Dicky,

who is pining for active service, and resents her refusal to take to the field. "Who has vexed you? Amory? You look warm. Have an ice."

"No, thank you."

"Coffee then? Some old idiot has given it as his opinion that hot soup cools the fevered brow. Therefore, why not hot coffee. Try it?"

"No. Nothing—*nothing!*" says Mary, who is rather irritable to-day. "Do be quiet, Dicky, there's the curtain going up. If *you* don't care about the play, *I* do."

The curtain has descended and risen again for the third time, and once more silence falls upon the audience, and a very flattering attention is turned on the stage. A woodland scene, very exquisitely painted, serves as a background for the heroine of the piece, who is met by chance, in a charmingly arranged glade, by the hero—the man to whom in her earlier days she had been engaged. It would take too long to give a full history of the play here, but it is necessary to explain one or two things. The heroine had once been a famous musician. Had suffered many things at many hands. Had been parted by the machinations of evil people from the man she loved in her first youth (Hero). Had been taught to believe him false. Had married, most unhappily, was now a widow; still believing the old tale against first love had come to meet him in Society. Struggle between her heart, and her doubt of him. Here in this glade he pleads with her once more;

for the last time! Proves to her that her suspicions have been unjust, and still, so old, so long has been the misunderstanding between them, that even at this supreme moment she shrinks from him, as though in disbelief of her own feeling for him. She turns from him, her face wrung with pain and uncertainty, and as if despair has seized him, he stands motionless. It is the final appeal! after this hope will be at an end. Already she has crossed the stage, she is nearly gone, when, suddenly a sound of music, the music of a violin—coming—coming, but *slowly*, strikes the ear. It is a sound that stirs both *his* heart and her own. What memories arise with it! What angel has stirred them? Did ever human creature play that sweet old air with so divine a meaning? A silence falls upon the heroine and hero, a silence too falls on the entire theatre.

And at last the renderer of those unequalled strains steps into view. A young girl with her violin! An entirely secondary person so far as the play is concerned, yet necessary as a means of reducing the heroine to a gentle frame of mind. *Quite* secondary! Yet Barbour, who is a very epicure in stage arrangements, and who will always have the very best even in minor matters, had judged rightly that this exquisite interlude (as it might be called) will be a distinct attraction and add yet one more lustre to the brilliancy of the play.

The girl advances slowly, violin on shoulder. She

d been referred to, casually, in the earlier movements of the play as a rising young musician, staying at the country house, and now at this instant—so caught with intense interest, she presents herself. She is a very, *very* young girl—a child one might almost say—gowned in a little pretty white morning frock from which the lace at the throat falls away in a large full collar, and without an ornament of any kind. A *lovely* child!

A passionate exclamation falls from Dalrymple. He springs to his feet, and is with difficulty pulled back again into a respectable position by Amory.

"Are you mad," says the latter. "Would you make a town-talk. Wait man, wait until the scene is over. Good Heavens! To think of her being *here!*"

Eleanor has advanced to the footlights! Her playing, so soft up to this as to be a mere suggestion of things to come, now changes, and with a sharp crash of the bow across the strings, the nature of her playing alters. That there is magic in her touch is beyond doubt, because the intense nervousness to which she is usually a prey fails to spoil the effect she is producing. At first she trembles so terribly that her agitation is perceptible, but after a minute or so she steadies herself, as it were, and *compels* herself to do her genius justice. The rendering of the sad and tender air chosen, meant to awaken the heroine to fond memories of the past, is so magnificently given, that the listeners, who

had anticipated nothing better than a pretty little bit of music, sit as one man, spell-bound.

The little magician who has entranced them all plays on with a delicacy, yet, withal, a wildness that bespeaks excitement hardly pleasurable. Too true an artist to be untrue to herself when occasion calls upon her for her best, she is still so frightened, so *horrificed* at her situation, as to scarcely know how she is to carry out this fearful engagement to an end.

Her face is white as death, her eyes are gleaming, her soft, lovely hair lies in fleecy clouds upon her low brow, every curve of her slight, childish form can be seen, as with a very passion of nervous excitement, she draws the bow across the strings. Never in all her life has she played as she plays now. The people listening, rapt, intent, scarce breathing, dwell upon each note, and marvel at the grace and beauty of the air thus given. The grace and beauty of the violinist is almost forgotten in the delight of the joy her genius affords.

Towards the end it is plain to those who know her, and are trembling for her, that she grows terribly nervous once again. There is no break-down, fortunately; she maintains her reputation firmly to the end, but that she is perilously near one is certain. It is, indeed, with difficulty that she keeps up until the final bar is given.

And now the end has come! Her right arm falls to her side, and after a hush, more complimentary than a thousand plaudits, a perfect storm of applause breaks

forth. The whole theatre rings with it. It is in effect an ovation!

Under cover of it, the little heroine of the moment—the lovely child on whom all eyes are centred—upset, frightened—hardly conscious of anything save a desire to escape—creeps from the stage—to find herself face to face with——Colonel Dalrymple!

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## CHAPTER XII.

## AN EXPLANATION.

“All accomplished little creature!  
Fatally endowed by nature—  
Were your inward soul laid bare,  
What should we discover under  
That seductive mask, I wonder—  
Beauty Clare?”

HIS face is stern, set, miserable—but she sees nothing of all that. Her relief, her joy at seeing some bulwark belonging to her old home is so great that she runs to him, and with trembling fingers seizes hold of him.

“Oh! it is you—you!” she gasps. “Quick, take me away from this. I’m frightened. Oh! it was horrible, wasn’t it? All those eyes!—those—” she stops short, dry sobs breaking her voice.

All the sternness, and a good deal of the misery has died out of Dalrymple’s face. That eager clutch of the small hands has been a sovereign cure for both.

“Where’s your bonnet, your cloak?” asks he, and having procured them he gets her into a cab, and presently they are far away from the theatre and the applause she had so longed for, had gained, and found so terrible a possession. The silence between them

s grown almost oppressive, and at last it is the man, at the woman who breaks it.

"What induced you to do this thing?" says he, coldly, but with a reproach so quiet, yet so suggestive of a cruel amount of suspense in the past, that she pales beneath it. She hangs the pretty head that had once been so very high and mighty and says, wisely—*nothing*.

"Answer me," says Dalrymple, gently.

"I don't know. I'm not sure. I wanted to play on—before—to be a regular musician, and find out what I was really worth, and, besides, you and grand-papa were so unkind to me."

"*I* was? Your grandfather, if you like; he has confessed to me that miserable threat of his, to disinherit you unless you married me; but what had *I* done?"

"Oh, *you*? You were much worse than grand-papa," says she with quite a long little sigh. "After all, that threat of his amounted to nothing. As *you* would not marry *me*, of course he could not disinherit me for your backsliding; so one can see at once that it was not for fear of being left penniless that I ran away."

Noel's spirit groans aloud, but spirits are proverbially noiseless, so she does not hear him.

"Well, as seemingly it was all my fault, I should like to know where my crime comes in," says he, a little stiffly.



"Do you mean to say you *never* were unkind to me? Have you forgotten that last night at home, and all you said?"

"I have forgotten nothing. But as I am a person of no consequence in your life, I fail to see how any word of mine could so far have affected you as to induce you to leave *your* home, and subject every friend you have to such prolonged anxiety."

"Oh, don't think I didn't fret about *that*," says she, vehemently, turning to him with her large eyes full of tears, and a little sob in her throat. "It has half killed me. Can't you *see* how thin I have grown? But if I had written you would have found me out, and taken me home, and—" she stops suddenly, and as though a full remembrance of the night's terror, past, yet ever present, crushes her once more, she covers her face with her hands and sinks back into the corner of the friendly hansom. "Oh, why didn't you find me out," she cries, "and spare me all this?"

"You gave us no chance; not a word, a line. What I want to know is, who helped you in this project of yours?"

"Mr. Barbour," says Nell, quite without *arrière pensée*. Indeed, Dalrymple's manner throughout has been so immaculately mild, that she hardly understands the passion of rage and grief that is consuming him.

"Barbour!" says he, giving loose the reins of anger now. "Well!" curbing himself by a supreme effort,

"never mind that now, he shall tell me about it later on."

"But you must not blame Mr. Barbour," exclaims she, eagerly, frightened by his manner, and sorry now for her admission. "You should not have asked me that question so quietly if you meant mischief by it. That was *mean*. And, as for Mr. Barbour, he is a friend of mine. A real friend. I shall consider him so, all my life. He was so *good* to me, far better than you, or grandpapa have ever been—*ever!* And as to being angry with him, it is absurd. He would not understand you. He is a devotee, an enthusiast, where his beloved Public are concerned. He is, indeed, a sort of Socialist. He believes all things in the way of genius should be given to the people. He is angry when riches interfere, and keep back talent from them. It is his creed, that the divine sparks that fall from heaven are meant for the good of all, and not for the *few*."

"He will permit me to have an opinion or two on that subject," says Dalrymple grimly.

"You are wrong there," says Eleanor eagerly. "You may quarrel with him, but you will not be able to reason him out of his belief. And," nervously, yet with some excitement, "I am not sure he isn't right, too; I agree with him, only," with a faint smile, "*I* haven't the courage of my opinions. I am too poor spirited a creature to help anyone in any cause, be it great or small."

"It was iniquitous of Barbour to keep us in ignorance of your whereabouts!"

"You must not blame him. You must not, indeed. Do not think he did not argue with me, and try to persuade me to return. But when he saw how determined I was, he could not resist the temptation of offering me up to his Deity."

"Yes; he sacrificed you," savagely.

"He would not see it in that light. Noel, don't say one uncivil word to him," says she, turning suddenly to her cousin with a suspicion of the old defiance breaking forth for the first time in voice and eye. "I won't have it. He is a good man. The very *kindest* man. I shall love him all my life. He took such care of me. He got me into such a pleasant home, with two old German people, Herr Schawnrker and his wife."

"Herr Schawnrker! Good heavens, what a name! You *have* indeed been revelling with the very cream of society." There is more angry regret than sarcasm in this speech. But Miss Fairfax refuses to see anything save the sarcasm.

"You can sneer as you will," says she loftily; "but I have known some men who considered *themselves* the cream of society who were not *half* so good gentlemen as Herr Schawnrker. And besides having *perfect* manners, and being a person quite incapable of making any woman unhappy by *taunts* and *innuendoes*, he could play the violin divinely."

"He, too, seems to have been a genius," says Dalrymple very meekly, thoroughly subdued, and reduced to a most proper frame of mind by this last withering attack.

"So he is," cries she eagerly, forgetful all at once of her own wrongs in her desire to trumpet abroad the virtues of her friend. "But he is poor—very poor. He is clever—oh, so clever! you should *hear* him play—but he is unfortunate."

"If so clever, why so unfortunate?"

"There are many people like that," says Nell with sad conviction; "it's *because* they're so clever, I think. They can't fix their minds on one thing, so crowded are their brains with lovely ideas. He could improvise by the hour sometimes, until he made the tears come into your eyes; but then other sometimes he could do nothing at all. The mood was not with him, he used to say. He could not *solidify* himself as it were. He is," with a sigh, "a little inconsequent perhaps."

"It might strike one as so," says Dalrymple drily. "And was it with this inconsequent person that Mr. Barbour saw fit to locate you?"

"Yes; why," turning large surprised eyes on him, "do you speak of him so? I tell you, he and his wife are the kindest souls on earth. They," taking fire for her whilom friends, in spite of the depression and fear under which she is labouring; "they gave me more love, and care, and sympathy in four weeks than I ever yet received from anyone."

"Nell!" says Dalrymple with shocked reproach, and then checks himself. "If they have been kind to you, and if they are poor, surely we can do something to show our gratitude to them—" he says, presently in a constrained tone, yet with evident feeling.

"Ah!" cries she, turning eagerly to him; "if you would help me, *there*, I should be grateful. But," nervously, "grandpapa, he—" Long pause. "Is he *very* angry, Noel?"

"He isn't exactly delighted with you," says Noel, rather ungenerously, it must be confessed.

"You mean— Where are we going?" cries she suddenly. "Oh, not to anybody I *know*. I couldn't—I *couldn't* face them again; and especially grandpapa. 'I'll go back,' springing up. 'I'd rather face the audience again than grandpapa.'"

"Sit down," says Dalrymple, compelling her rather unceremoniously to resume her seat. "Your grandfather is not so formidable as you choose to believe him. You," stiffly, "needn't be uneasy about meeting him; he is decidedly anxious to get you home again."

"To scold me? to lock me up, perhaps?" questions Miss Fairfax, who has evidently small faith in Lord Carbyne's tender mercies.

"No—to forgive and receive you," says Dalrymple. And then, sadly, "What had we all done to you, Nell, that you should regard us as so many ogres?"

"*Will* he forgive, Noel, are you *sure*?" says she,

tears starting to her eyes. "Oh, if I were sure of that. But—but he has been always so stern that I'm afraid to meet him now; and yet," she pauses—struggles with herself for a moment, and then is vanquished. She bursts into tears. "I'm even *more* afraid to go back to that awful theatre," she sobs, crying now as if her heart will break.

"Nell, Nell! don't go on like that: I tell you, I swear to you that Lord Carbyne will receive you with open arms. My darling—my dear girl, if I had a doubt of what I say, do you think I would speak like this or deceive you in any way? As for going back to the theatre, you may be assured that *that* is out of the question for ever." He has almost unconsciously slipped his arm round her waist, and she unconsciously, too, no doubt, takes no notice of it.

"It must seem strange to you that I should now so hate the publicity that before I so craved," says she, drying her eyes, yet sobbing a little every now and then. "I didn't know what it would be like, I suppose. You see"—forlornly—"it was all very well playing to one's friends and acquaintances, even though they might be counted by hundreds, but to play to *everybody*—to the crowd! Do you know," lifting her tear-stained eyes to his, "I used to think that because it was the crowd, it would be more intoxicating to play to it—but—I was wrong. It did not please, it only frightened me."

"Yes," says he, *apropos* of nothing. In truth he

hardly hears her. He is overcome by the fact that she has let him keep his arm round her slender waist without rebuke.

"It was dreadful," goes on Miss Fairfax, lost in her own reverie. "All at once I felt those myriad eyes fixed upon me. Upon *me alone!* If I had been acting *with* somebody, like the heroine of the play, it would have been different, we might have divided the honours, but the part assigned me left me alone."

"Not more alone than if you had been playing at a concert."

"Oh, yes, *yes!* I was a novelty in a play, don't you see? One doesn't often get *good* music out of a trifling third part in a comedy, and I *know* my music is good," says she, as if very much ashamed of herself for saying so, yet compelled to be honest. "Mr. Barbour thought it would be a good opening for me. The play was sure to be a success, and people would come and talk of my playing."

"And the coming of the people would ensure the financial popularity of the play. Barbour is wise in his own generation."

"Mr. Barbour is not what you think him," says she, quietly if distinctly now, as though she has grown weary of argument. "Never mind that, however."

"No, go on; tell me of how you felt to-day, when——"

"You know," says she, nodding her head, "just frightened; nothing more. My nerve nearly gave way,

but not altogether, did it? Did I—" raising troubled misty eyes to his—"Did I disgrace myself?—did they *know* that I was such a coward? Was," with a tremulous little laugh, "positively her first and last appearance a dismal failure?"

"I don't know—I hardly remember—I saw nothing, could think of nothing but that you were there before me, after having been for so long a time lost to me. Oh, yes!" impatiently, "of course I *did* hear you. You played magnificently. The whole theatre sat silent with delight. They had expected nothing of that sort in a simple play. Yes, be satisfied. It was a glorious triumph!"

"You—to speak like that?" says she, regarding him with wide eyes. "Well! and so I was given white beans, not black—" she pauses, sighs slightly, as if with some strange contentment, and then, "Well, I've had my day," says she in a low tone.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

## DALRYMPLE GAINS HIS END.

"O darling eyelids' delicate droop?  
O little sweet mouth, so red, so pure!  
There in the twilight while I stoop,  
Beautiful Amoret looks demure.  
There's a word to whisper: who can guess?  
Will it be No, sweet? will it be, Yes?"

AFTER all, Dalrymple was right. In spite of Eleanor's dismay at the thought of the meeting with her grandfather, that old gentleman received her with open arms. Arms more open, indeed, than they had ever been before in their owner's life. Stern, tyrannical, intolerant, accustomed to obedience from those connected with him, he had been struck down to the very earth by the desertion of his grandchild. Eleanor, whose spirit, in truth, was in some points akin to his own, had defied him, flung his threat in his face, and left him to repent of it at leisure.

He had not known that he loved her till he lost her. She was the sole remaining link between him and his past, and the girl's lovely face and spontaneous laughter, and petulant ways had become so dear to him, so much a part of his daily existence, that when

he looked and listened for them in vain, the existence itself seemed worthless.

When Miss Fairfax, in fear and trembling, approached the library door on her return, and stood irresolute without it, and finally found herself inside it, through the good management of Dalrymple, who had given her a determined push, that placed her *en évidence*, whether she would or not, Lord Carbyne rose and held out his hands to her.

"Nelly—Nelly!" said he, in a low tone, but with such eagerness, such delight, such *comfort*, that she ran to him with a sob, and threw her arms around his neck.

The old man clung to her. He, who had proudly repressed all feeling throughout a lifetime, became now demonstrative. Perhaps it was a relief to him to give way at last to some honest emotion. He spoke no word of condemnation to her, but held her to him, and patted her pretty, naughty head, and implored her to cease from crying. A bond of friendship and love was signed that day between her and him that never afterwards was cancelled.

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"You see I was right, Nell, he bore you no malice," says Dalrymple, turning back from the window, which is open, to look at her. Dinner is at an end, and so, indeed, is, or ought to be, the evening, but Miss Fairfax, who is too tired to be sleepy, has lingered in the

drawing-room, instead of sensibly taking up her candle and going to bed.

"He has been too good to me," says she gently. "How is it, Noel? What has changed him? Do you think he will wake to-morrow his old self, and give me the usual round dozen?"

"He will never scold you again," says Dalrymple. "You have conquered the conqueror. You are safe for the future. To be just to him, Nell; he has found out that he loves you, and that discovery has worked a miracle."

"I'm not worth it," says she contritely. To this, Dalrymple, who is looking out at the starlit sky, makes no response.

"You evidently agree with me," says she, with a nervous laugh. He turns quickly towards her, but, as if dreading his reply, she springs to her feet and goes towards the window. "What is the attraction out there?" says she, with all the air of one who is determined to keep up the conversation or die. "Stars? A moon? Oh! what a lovely sky." She steps on to the balcony.

"It is cold. Don't go out—or if you will, put this round you," says Dalrymple, throwing a large white shawl over her shoulders. "Yes, the night is lovely. But look here, Nell, I *don't* agree with you; understand that, once for all."

"Well, that's rather a rude speech," says she, with

a little laugh. "Isn't it? Never mind, you *needn't* explain; I know everything you would say."

Thus silenced, Colonel Dalrymple leans his arms upon the balcony, and gazes into the night, and she, doing the same, a rather awkward pause ensues with which neither of them knows what to do.

"What are you thinking of?" asks he at last.

"Of many things. Of that afternoon in the theatre, principally."

"Regretting it?"

"*No!*" emphatically; "but yet hoping I did my best."

"You need not be uneasy about that. You did magnificently. Even I, upset as I was by your unexpected appearance there, was thrilled by your playing. What spirit helped you?"

"What! *you* appreciated my music?"

"Am I so altogether Heaven-forsaken a creature that I cannot like sweet sounds?"

"But *my* music. I thought you hated my poor violin."

"Why, so I do. Has it not been ever my rival—it—and—— There is one thing," in a low tone; "I have hated Dartford *more!*"

"You were foolish," says she slowly. "He was nothing to me—nothing at any time. Not," lightly, "that it matters at all now; only——"

"He was clever," says Dalrymple gloomily. "A born musician. He had the pull over me there. No,

you needn't speak; I know I had no chance, whether or no, but still I shall always feel that he had one chance the more. Did he know of your intention to go upon the stage?"

"He! Why should *he* know; when I would not tell even Mary Sylvester, I should think I would not tell anybody. And he—why should *he* be told?"

"I don't know. I fancied——"

"Your imagination seems to be your strong point," says Miss Fairfax, with indignant sarcasm. "As a novelist, you'd make your fortune. But I know you disapprove of publicity in any form. I can quite understand the feeling of horror with which you now regard me after my late escapade."

"You can imagine my feelings for me, if you will," says Dalrymple coldly. "*That* won't affect them in any way. However, if only to please you, I will confess that I can't imagine *why* you wished to try your fortune in the way you did."

"How else was I to do it? It was a failure, of course; but a great many people want to make their bread, cake, and so did I."

"It was not a failure," says he, as if jealous for her. "Your courage failed indeed, but that only."

"Dick Sylvester was horrid about it," says she, after a moment or two. "He said I was the colour of a peony, and that my eyes were starting from their sockets." She had seen the Sylvesters in town, and, *in fact*, had stayed with them until she returned to her

grandfather. "He said, too," with an irrepressible laugh, "that my knees shook under me, *so* hard, that I was unable to bring out the right notes on the violin. He protested that it was an Irish jig I played instead of that slow plaintive air."

"Dicky's a fool," says Dalrymple shortly.

"I'm glad I was discovered," says Eleanor presently—"if only on account of Mary. She was behaving rather unkindly to Sir John, I think; but now they will be married at once. I *like* to think that those two dear people will be happy."

"You are kind to everybody, save one," says Dalrymple, with a touch of passion. "What have I, of all the world, done to you that you should make my life a misery to me?"

"I?" As if alarmed by his vehemence she shrinks a little from him.

"Yes; *you!* I am mad to speak, I know. It will do no good, but one cannot always be silent. I am not appealing to you, mind you," turning fiercely on her. "The day for that is past, it is only that I *must* tell you how I love you."

"*Don't!*" says she quickly, putting up her hand. It is an unpremeditated gesture that speaks volumes.

"I know," says he bitterly, "you don't wish to hear me. It only annoys you. You have no pity for me. You have, indeed, no heart."

"It was just here, on this very spot, almost at this hour, you last treated me to a very unpleasant fit of

temper. That time, too, you reviled me, if I remember rightly, and told me all sorts of unwelcome truths about myself. I must really beg, Noel, that you will spare me such another *mauvais quart d'heure*."

"Don't go," says Dalrymple, catching her arm as she passes him. "Let me say one thing, at least. That night of which you speak—I want to apologise to you for what I said then. However true my words were, I had no right to utter them. I meant to beg your pardon next day—I was very unhappy about it. I stayed awake all that night doing penance for what must be termed my impertinence; but you put it out of my power to seek your forgiveness. In the morning you were gone."

"You say you were sorry for your words—though—though you still believe that—the—the—cause of them—was just." She is speaking slowly, and rather uncertainly; but her eyes are fixed earnestly on his.

"Yes," says he in a low tone, *his* eyes on the ground.

She turns aside abruptly, and leaning her arms upon the railings of the balcony looks towards the sea, across which the moon is now flinging a silvery path that seems to lead quite easily from earth to Heaven.

"And yet—you say you love me?" says she.

"That is my misfortune," says Dalrymple. "I cannot drive you from my heart. I have tried—but it is

seless. That you cannot return my love, I know, but, why can't we be friends, Nelly?"

"Too late," says she. Her face is hidden from him, but her voice sounds cold and forbidding. "*How* can you want to be friends with a girl whom you accuse of—of having—— Who you believe——" It is impossible to put it into words. She breaks off.

"Whatever I said, whatever I thought——"

"*Think*—THINK is the word," interrupts she, in a rather stifled tone now.

"I had no right to say it. You were at liberty to do as you wished. I can see now that it was not an honest desire to set before you right and wrong, but an ungovernable jealousy, that led me to—to *insult* you—as I did that night. I shall never forgive myself for it, Eleanor. I can, then, scarcely hope that *you* will forgive me."

He, too, is leaning on the railings by this time, trying hard to read her face. He finds that, however, a feat beyond him; she has so managed matters that her features lie in shadow.

"And yet you *should*," says he softly, imploringly, when you remember how long I have loved you, and that I ask now for only that outside thing—friendship. Nelly, speak to me! Good Heavens! How can you be so *heartless*, when you see how wretched I am?"

He has moved nearer to her—still leaning on the railings—in the vehemence of his despair; so near, in-



deed, that, without meaning it, he touches her. A magnetic touch! Involuntarily she turns her head towards him. There are tears in her eyes, and something else—something he has never seen in them before. There is a breathless pause—a little soft sound that might be a sigh or a sob—and then, in a moment, as it were, she is in his arms, her cheek pressed closely against his, and all doubts, and fears, and suspicions are at an end for ever.

“Darling! Beloved!” says he.—The first great surprise is at an end, and now the realising of it is at hand. “Is it *true*? *Can* it be true?” There is a good deal more of this, but it seems cruel to record it. Every young man and maiden can supply it for themselves. There is no monopoly.

“I don’t know *how* it was,” says Mis Fairfax presently; “but I *suppose*—I think—I *know*” (positively this), “that I loved you always in spite of my being so bad to you; but I was never *sure* of it, until that day when you rescued me from the theatre.”

“You know it now,” holding her closely to him; “that is everything.”

“Not quite everything, Noel,” tremulously. “Are you sure you could love anyone whom you thought had once loved somebody else?”

“I could,” says Dalrymple stoutly, “if she were sure she didn’t love somebody else *now*.”

“She doesn’t,” softly. “She never did.” She pauses here, struggles with herself for a moment, and finally

ts out crying. "Noel, you were wrong. I *never* liked that man. *Never*—and now I hate him!"

"Yes, yes; I know; I understand," soothingly, but, considering all things, exasperatingly. "It is all at an end now."

"You don't ask any questions. Don't you want to know?" cries she wrathfully. "There is something I want to tell you."

"My darling, I will ask no questions. If—if once I thought you liked him, why, it was a mistake, wasn't it?" a little sadly, "and you *know* you love me, don't you?"

"Oh, that is not it at all," cries she impatiently. She raises herself, and laying her hands against his shoulders, leans back so as to look at him more closely. "Do you remember," with a hot blush, "that when you accused me of having let Lord Dartford kiss me in the conservatory, I did not deny it? I was too angry with you—too *hurt*—to defend myself. But I deny it now. He proposed to me that evening, and I refused. You believe me, Noel, don't you?"

"Oh, Nelly, why didn't you say all that before?"

"Well, never mind; I'll make it up to you," says Fairfax generously, nestling up to him in the little childish way that belongs to her.

"If you only knew all I suffered on account——"

"I don't want to know," hastily. "There! Take care of your face. That's the expression your face always gets when you are going to scold me."

And I'm *never* to be scolded again, mind that. The very first *hint* at it, and I'll run away from you *for ever*."

"You won't; you'd be afraid," laughing. "I'll never forget the abject terror you displayed that afternoon that was to have made you famous."

"Pouf! Courage comes with custom. I might not mind it a bit the next time. However, if you are good, I'll stay with you. There is one thing, though, I want to talk to you about. My violin! You," earnestly, yet smiling, "will let me play sometimes to people, won't you?"

"Now that I am not jealous of it, or of anyone," says he happily, "I will confess to you that I love to hear you play. It was only because I couldn't bear to see Dartford accompanying you, that I would not show my delight in your music before. It seems to be too much luck for any fellow to get not only the sweetest and loveliest, but the cleverest little wife in Christendom."

"Now *why* didn't they teach you the piano when you were young—and you might have accompanied me always," says she with some dejection. "I suppose," doubtfully, "you couldn't be taught *now*?"

"I'm quite positive I couldn't," says Dalrymple with considerable alarm, Miss Fairfax being a person of remarkable energy. "My darling girl, just think of it. Why, my fingers are as stiff as a board."

"Are they? They look all right. Well," with a

h of disappointment, "I suppose we must abandon  
t scheme."

"I suppose so," says Dalrymple, with a sigh of relief.

"I shall look round the country," dolefully, "and  
d some old maid somewhere, who has a taste  
——"

"Nonsense, Nelly! One would think I was a monster  
jealousy. You shall do no such thing. Do you think  
should feel even one pang if I saw you studying with  
modern Adonis, after—after *this?*" with a fond hug.  
'ut! I know better than that. Oh! darling Heart!—  
seems *impossible* that I should be as happy as I am.  
d you—you are happy too? Say it!"

"I won't," says Miss Fairfax, with a mutinous little  
ugh. But she pulls his head down to hers as she  
eaks, to give him a little tender kiss. "Why should  
tell you what you know? There—good-night, and  
ppy dreams!"

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“O N T R I A L.”



## “ON TRIAL.”

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SHE was one of those girls who are perhaps more attractive than strictly pretty, because certainly her features had their faults. Her skin, however, was like satin—creamy, delicious, with a little soft flush running through it; and over her low, broad brow her chestnut hair fell in a soft natural wave. No maid had ever cut it; it was in fact “born so,” and it blew from side to side as the wind listed, and was touched with gold here and there, and had indeed a good deal to do with her many conquests.

Her first season had pronounced her an undeniable success; which meant that to her brother, Lord Hartley, she became at once a decided anxiety. She was never now without one, or rather two, young men hanging after her wherever she went, not only to balls and at homes in town, but to the Tyrol or the Highlands afterwards, and wherever the Hartleys might chance to go. It was indeed Lady Hartley's private



opinion that had they elected to go to Hudson's for the winter, there these young men would have appeared up to time, and ready as ever to fall down and worship her sister-in-law.

And they weren't always the same two young men either: that added to the grievance. Miss Chauncy had many little ways, but the cleverest of all was a little way in which she used to get rid of a suitor when he grew importunate. This cleverness was hardly appreciated by Lady Hartley, upon whom fell, as a part of the task of consoling and smoothing down the disappointed one. She was thus compelled to think a good deal about Sophy, off and on, and just now she was particularly anxious about her, because she feared she was going to decline the best match of the year. Lady Hartley was young herself, and was not without sympathy and affection for her sister-in-law, but she certainly thought her very foolish: and she didn't in the least know how to manage her. She was a very good woman, if a trifle plaintive and given to looking at the unwearable side of things. She was a good woman intensely devoted to her nursery, as a good woman should be, but she was, perhaps, a trifle dull.

Just now she was worrying over two things: the baby's teething, which exercised her mind quite as much as though she had not seen three other babies get through the same obnoxious process, and her fear that Sophy would at the last refuse Lord Elston's —and very handsome rent-roll. She was divide

tween these two anxieties, when the door opened and Sophy herself entered the room.

"Anything the matter, Molly?" asked she, after a cursory glance at Lady Hartley's inexpressive features. The latter had been christened a decorous Mary by an Archbishop, but Miss Charteris insisted on calling her Molly, which of course was a trial. She came across the room now with her usual light, swift step, and leant over the back of Lady Hartley's chair. "Are the children all right?" she asked. "Baby's tooth through yet? You look as if some one had been giving you a severe scolding."

"I have many things to worry me," said Lady Hartley, with a sigh. "And, of course, I cannot help feeling anxious about baby."

"That big, fat baby!" said Miss Charteris, laughing. "Dear Molly, how silly! It is merely his teething—I *hope*—that induces him to give way to those wild fits of diabolical temper."

"Oh, no! He is not ill-tempered. He has the temper of a very angel," interrupted the mother reproachfully. "It is all, I am convinced, the fault of that coral his grandmother sent him."

"Then why let him have it? Why not get him a proper ring? Edith never has any other. A thick, soft india-rubber ring. It is not pretty, but babies like it, which, of course, is everything."

"And how am I to get one in this out-of-the-way place?" returned Lady Hartley helplessly.

"I'll write to George. He is coming down for these theatricals, you know, the day after to-morrow, and he shall bring it."

"George!" Lady Hartley repeated, regarding her anxiously. "Do you mean to tell me you write to George?"

"Now and then."

"After all that passed between you last spring? Do you think Lord Elston would like it, if he heard of it?"

"I don't know, so I can't say."

"Sophy!" said Lady Hartley, in a solemn tone, "I do hope you are not going to do anything foolish with regard to Elston!"

"I hope not, indeed," said Miss Charteris, with a solemnity that put her sister's in the shade, but she rather spoiled it by laughing afterwards.

"It is distinctly wrong of you to encourage George. And you *must* know," waxing a little warm, "that even one line from you in his present frame of mind will be sufficient to waken all the old regret. Now, Sophy, tell me one thing: do you, or do you not like Lord Elston?"

Miss Charteris employed herself for a moment or two in looking deeply into the fire. Then she said, with the most indifferent air in the world:

"I'm not sure."

"That terrible sentence!" cried Lady Hartley impatiently; "I'm tired of it. Invent another, I beseech

you. No, don't stand there. Come round here where I can see you. Do you know that chronic state of yours of not being sure is causing you to be rather too freely discussed by your friends? And for a girl to be talked about—that, you will admit, is undesirable. And you know, too, that when people once begin to talk they never know where to stop."

"I do, indeed," returned Miss Charteris, with a comical glance at her.

"You mean that for me, of course. But I don't mind. I shall do my duty, whatever comes of it. And now, what fault do you see in Lord Elston?"

"He is too rich and too jealous."

"His jealousy proves his love. And if riches stand in his way, why, it is the first time I ever knew them regarded as an objection. And you should be the last to say that. You know you said last year you refused George because he was too poor."

"That only shows how I hate extremes. George is too poor; Lord Elston too rich."

"Nonsense. I begin to think you have still a secret kindness for George."

"I hope you are wrong. As, in spite of the passion you think he still entertains for me, I hear he has fallen a victim to the *beaux yeux* of that youngest Miss Wolverton. Ah! Molly, I fear my swains are not so faithful as yours were."

"I trust that what you tell me is true. If, indeed,

you do not think of George, why can't you make up your mind to Elston?"

"I have told you. Never mind what I said about his money—if you will have my real reason—it is his jealous disposition that I dread. How could I expect happiness with a man who suspects me of—of all sorts of things the moment I am out of his sight?"

"Of flirting with other men, you mean. You cannot deny, Sophy, that you have given him cause."

"Well, not for a long time now. Not lately; yet he is as suspicious as ever."

"Once married, that would be all at an end."

"So you think— No; I should be afraid to venture."

"Is that your only reason for hesitating?"

Miss Charteris blushed, and then laughed lightly.

"You ask me a good deal," she said. "Well, even if I do confess to its being an only one, surely it is as strong as twenty smaller ones. There! I sha'n't submit to any further cross-examination. I shall go and give George directions about that ring."

She moved towards the door. Lady Hartley called after her.

"Don't be too hard on him," she said. "You know you wouldn't like it were he utterly devoid of jealousy. Give him a chance. Why not find some way of putting him on trial for a certain time, to test him?"

"But I know of no plan," returned Sophy carelessly.

As she crossed the hall, the door of the library opened and a young man came towards her. He was tall and well made and about twenty-nine. He was dressed in tennis flannels and held a racket in his hand. He had very dark, earnest eyes, and these lit up as he saw Miss Charteris.

"I was just going to look for you, Sophy. Come out, and let me give you a beating."

"I like that!" said she contemptuously. "Put it the other way round and I may be able to understand you. No, I can't go yet. I should like a game, but there is something I must do first."

"There always is," returned he, in an aggrieved tone. "As a rule I always come off second best with you."

"And quite right too," she laughed saucily.

"I wonder if you care for me at all?" said Elston, in a gloomy sort of way.

"Yes, I do," returned she, "*sometimes*."

"Which means that I annoy you other times. Is that it? Why are you silent, Sophy? Tell me my sin."

"Would you really have me tell you?" asked she gravely, lifting her eyes to his.

"I would, indeed."

"Why, then," said she softly, "beware, my lord, of jealousy."

"Jealous! You think me jealous!" exclaimed he. "Why, I believe I am the least jealous man on earth. Were it otherwise, you—"

He stopped abruptly.

"Go on," said she, a little haughtily. "Were it otherwise you think I should give you food for it; but you forget that there is no reason why I should study your wishes. You have no claim on me."

This was a little cruel of her, but she was angry.

"I know that," he said humbly. He regarded her with a keen reproach. "Sophy! will you never give me that claim?"

"I tell you I should be afraid," said Miss Charteris, softened in a degree by that submissive glance, but still rather impatiently. "A jealous man is a terrible thing."

"I think you misjudge me. Of course, very naturally, I should like all your smiles to be my own, but I do not really believe I am the irrational creature you would portray me. Try me, Sophy. Give yourself to me, and I do not think you will repent it."

He had taken her hand, and now, holding it fast, sought to read her eyes. But she kept them religiously lowered. Still she did not draw her hand away, and it was evident that she hesitated. It even seemed to him, by the yielding of her lips, that she was almost on the point of speech that would declare her won, when suddenly she moved back from him and shook her charming head. There was a new light in her eyes as she looked up, as though she had come to some strange resolution.

"I shall put you on trial first," she said gaily. Lady

Hartley's last words, though still so fresh in her mind, were already bearing fruit. "Do not look so frightened," she went on, smiling. "Your probation shall not be too prolonged. Just one small week! If during those seven days you prove yourself three times *unreasonably* jealous of any act of mine, you will—"

"*Three* times! Oh, absurd!" he said hastily. "You cannot really imagine me so senseless as that."

"I am generous, you see," said she calmly. "As you yourself admit, I give you a large margin. Perhaps," with a slight but charming blush, "I do not wish you to fail. Well!—*No*! Stay just there and listen. If you *should* chance to sin thus three times, you will give me your word to relinquish for ever all hope of—well, of—oh, you know!" she said. "On the other hand, if you do not sin thrice, I for my part will promise to—"

"Yes, go on," entreated he eagerly. "You will give yourself to me as my reward. Is that it?"

"Let it be so," said she, smiling prettily, whilst her blush deepened. He bent over her hands and kissed them with a fond and tender passion.

"I did not think this morning that midday would see me so happy a man," he said, with glad triumph, his dark eyes alight.

"Do not boast," said she warningly. But she smiled as she warned, and he heeded only the smile.

"This is Thursday. This day week I shall envy no man."



She ran away from him, up two or three steps of the staircase, but his voice compelled her to stop.

"Don't be long," he entreated: and there was hope and joy and new life in his tone.

"About ten minutes. If you don't mind waiting about for a bit, I'll join you then."

He did "wait about," for such a considerably longer "bit" than the ten minutes named, that he was a trifle restless and impatient when at last she did appear. She tripped down as unconcernedly as possible, however, with a letter in her hand.

"Oh! it was *that* kept you," said he, casting a wrathful glance at the letter. "To whom were you writing?"

Miss Charteris raised her brows, and then looked amused.

"What a singularly rude question," she said.

He coloured.

"Was it rude? Why?"

"For the simple reason that I might not care to tell you."

"Why should you not care?"

To this she made no answer beyond a little swift glance as she moved towards the post-bag that lay on a side table. By some accident her hand brushed against the heavy fronds of a large fern, and the letter fell to the ground, address uppermost.

It was quite impossible that he could prevent him-

rom seeing it. The writing was singularly large  
egible for a woman, and

The Hon. GEORGE MARKHAM,  
The Albany,  
London,

o clear that it might have been print of a good

His face was as dark as night as he picked it  
and returned it to Miss Charteris.

It wasn't my fault," he said.

Certainly not. It was my awkwardness. Still, as  
know, it is an ill wind that blows nobody good  
-you have had your curiosity gratified."

he was a little flushed as she spoke—a fact that  
saw and dwelt upon.

I have seen what I had no desire to see," he  
red stiffly.

Well, why *shouldn't* I write to George?" she  
, a touch of defiance in her tone. "He is a  
old friend." She was a little put out by the  
affair.

Why, indeed? I am bound, of course, to remember  
ie was first in the field."

Oh! If you you put it that way!" she said. She  
d sharply away, and then as suddenly stopped.  
ppose," indignantly, "you think I ought to open  
etter and show you the contents?"

[ do," returned he boldly.

You suspect me, then?"

"I should certainly like to see what you have writt to Markham. You call him an old friend, but y must acknowledge he was rather more than that to y a year ago."

"Not more to me—whatever I may have been him." She paused, and then throwing up her hea regarded him fixedly. "You remember our compact a while since?" she asked. "Such a *little* while. bare half-hour, I think. You remember it?"

He paled perceptibly.

"Is *this* jealousy?" she said.

"You spoke of a jealousy without reason. Am now unreasonable? Have you proved me so?"

"Have you proved that you are *not* so? How c you know what this letter contains? There is such thing as Time, *that* will prove which of us is right."

There was scorn in her glance as she looked him and threw down her racket upon a hall chair.

"A week!" she said bitterly. "I should have ma it a *day*! Already—though but a few minutes ha passed—you have transgressed once."

She cast one last reproachful glance at him, whi betrayed the fact of her eyes being full of tears, a then left him.

Although totally unconvinced, and inwardly ragi against George Markham, fear of Sophy's displeasu had such a hold on Lord Elston, that he determined subdue himself and give her no further cause for ang Whatever happened, whatever she might choose to c

he would be blind and deaf to it until this momentous week was at an end. Once his, he thought, all would be right. During the evening, therefore, he so managed to conduct himself that Miss Charteris, outwardly at least, forgave him.

The next day brought an influx of visitors for the private theatricals impending, and in which Sophy was to bear a principal part. Elston, having no talent that way, was, of course, shut out from the frequent rehearsals that, after the arrival of the last contingent, went on morning, noon, and night. He certainly objected to the absorption of Sophy's time, but he was still so careful to avoid a second offence, that he pretended a deep interest in the play, which secretly was a thing of detestation to him.

Amongst the actors there was a tall, angular young man, with a glowing eye, a Roman nose, and a tragic expression. This latter was perhaps born of a belief in his own histrionic powers, and the opinion of a few friends of his that he was the very image of Mr. Irving. He was, at all events, the leading spirit of the theatricals that just then possessed the guests at Hartley Court. His manner was impressive, and he had acquired a trick of taking people aside into corners and recesses, behind screens and palms, and there whispering to them in a solemn, earnest fashion that precluded the least of frivolity.

By degrees it became noticeable that it was generally Miss Charteris who was drawn by him behind the

Japanese screens and branching palms. But as the mysterious conferences were presumably about the play in which she was to take the principal *rôle*, and as she seemed to bear up wonderfully under the infliction of these repeated interviews, no one felt called upon to go to her rescue. Lord Elston writhed beneath it all, yet made no sign. For two whole days indeed he suffered torments, betraying no temper, and putting in rather mechanical smiles in the right places; but on the third day an event occurred that destroyed his newly-formed resolves to endure all things rather than again show himself distrustful to his lady-love.

On the top of the small hill at the very end of the fruit garden, a glass-house had been built that was specially dedicated to pelargoniums. It was rather far from the house and, therefore, seldom visited by any people staying at Hartley; but Elston, who was fond of this particular flower, strolled up sometimes to look at them, although it was growing towards the end of July, and their first loveliness was nearly at an end. It was the Monday following that eventful Thursday on which Miss Charteris had put him on his trial, that he went up to the pelargonium house to try and while away the time until he could hope again to see Sophy. Ever since these wretched amateurs had descended upon the house, she had been conspicuous by her absence from eleven to luncheon—studying her part in her own room, as Lord Elston fondly, if erroneously, believed.

At some distance from it, but on a line with the

eastern end of the glass-house, ran a hedge of laurel sufficiently thick to conceal the approach of any one coming from that side. Elston, walking leisurely towards it, became all at once conscious that a voice—the voice indeed in all the world for him—was sounding somewhere near. He looked through a large hole in the hedge, and discovered that Miss Charteris was in the house—the door of which was open—and that she was not alone! The tragic young man was with her!

*With her?* Inadequate explanation! He was on his knees to her!

Elston felt his colour forsake him; his breath come and go with difficulty; his limbs tremble beneath him—as he took in the fatal scene. Yes! There he was, kneeling before her, a whole world of despairing love in his eloquent eyes, now more aglow than ever. He was holding her hand in both of his in quite a frenzied fashion, and, even as Elston gazed, spellbound, he proceeded to devour it with kisses!

And she! perfidious girl! how did she receive his insolent advances? With the withering scorn they deserved? With a gesture of hatred and aversion? No! She turned her head coyly to one side and permitted him without rebuke to press the lovely hand upon which he—Elston—only a minute since had been tenderly dwelling, as upon a priceless treasure that some day might be his. There was a curious expression, too, upon her false face, as though she were waiting with

a girlish bashfulness for a word from him that should decide her fate.

It came at last. Not one, but many words in a very torrent of wild entreaty.

"My beloved! My most adored one!" cried the tragic young man, in tones loud and clear; remarkably so indeed—no doubt on account of the intensity of his emotion. "Do not consign me to despair—and an early grave. A single word of hope is all I dare demand. Grant it, ere I perish. To-morrow will see me over the border: let me take with me into my enforced exile one smile, one blessed assurance that you are not altogether indifferent to me!"

He waited her reply in apparently breathless suspense. So did Elston. Slowly—very slowly, she pressed her handkerchief to her averted face.

"If I only dared believe you would be true," she faltered, very distinctly.

Elston stayed to hear no more. Stricken, crushed by this perfidy in one he had esteemed so highly, he turned his steps backward and went blindly down the path by which he had ascended—to his doom. He scarce knew whither he went. On and on he walked through the shady garden, until at last he came to a high stone wall—only recognising that, indeed, when his nose came nearly in contact with it. He could not go through it, and it was impossible to climb it, so perforce he pulled himself up and began to retrace his steps. This he did, still in a blind fury of rage and

rief, that burst into open flame as a turn in a path brought him suddenly face to face with Sophy.

She was coming towards him and was singing—actually *singing*—in a blithe, sweet, careless way, a new ballad that had taken her fancy of late. With one hand she was holding up her gown—in the other was a big red rose that she was swinging lightly to and fro. She looked like one who was without a care in the world—or a regret—or a remorse. One could see her dainty feet in their Parisian shoes and hear the click-clack of the high heels, as she tripped down the little hilly pathway. She seemed indeed at the moment the very incarnation of all sweetness and light. When she saw Elston she stopped singing, and smiled instead.

"You here! And at this hour!" cried she. "Traitor! Have you found me out then? Such hardihood! Such effrontery!"

"Yes. And in time," returned he, standing still and gazing at her with concentrated wrath on his pale face. Then his anger burst all bounds. "How do you *dare* to speak to me?" he said, in a low but terrible tone. Miss Charteris drew back.

"What on earth has happened? Are you mad?" she said.

"Sane rather—at last. This morning I was mad indeed—then I believed in you. "Now—" He threw out his hand with a gesture that would have done



credit to the tragic young man himself—"now—*all*."

"It seems to be a good deal," remarked Charteris composedly, though her face had lost colour. "It is, also evidently of much interest. hear it?"


"This persistent deception is unworthy—nay, *unworthy* of you!" cried he, bitterly. "Learn then just now I saw you and—and that mountebank glass-house above."

"I don't know any mountebank. I am the more at sea than ever." As she said this in her tones, his lordship regarded her with undisguised disdain.

"You know one at all events," he said. "His name is Pelham." Then his rage broke forth again. "When you I saw him on his knees to you—swearing, promising how he loved you; whilst you—*you*—listen to him, you encouraged him. I did not wait for that, but your manner left me no doubt that you encouraged him."

Miss Charteris struggled with herself for a moment and then burst out laughing. There was a good deal of irrepressible amusement in this laughter, but it was more anger.

"I see," she said. "And so you think you surprised Captain Pelham making love to me? Well, listen—" she dropped her rose, and drawing a small paper volume from her pocket, opened it with



deliberation at a certain page, and began to read out aloud:

"'My beloved! My most adored one! Do not consign me to despair—'" and so on to the end of what he had heard behind the laurel hedge. As she proceeded, his face changed. First it grew blank, then crimson. Then a wild hope sprang into it that had to do battle with a great shame. When Miss Charteris had finished to the last word, she paused, folded the play with irritating precision, and returned it to her pocket. "You have done me and Captain Pelham much honour," she said coolly. "It is certain that, in *your* eyes at least, we shall pass muster as very tolerable actors."

She swept by him as she spoke and went on her way to the gate beyond, cruelly unconcerned in manner. She even took up and continued the song she had been singing, from the very part where she had broken off. She was in no wise disconcerted or put out. This indifference was terrible.

He hurried after her and caught her up just under the hanging ivy of the gateway.

"One word," he entreated miserably. "You gave me three chances. You remember that?"

"Yes. I also remember that two of them are at an end."

"Oh, no. That first one, it has not been *proved* unreasonable."

"I told you not to depend too much on that. O Thursday next you shall *see* that objectionable letter."

She would barely look at him, and his heart sank. If she could show him that letter, there must indeed have been nothing in it to justify his jealousy! Still there was one more chance left him. He took courage.

"You blame me," he said, in a low voice. "But you might know that if I did not love you as I do, you would not have to blame me. I pray you to remember that."

She made him no answer to this, beyond a swift glance he found it difficult to translate; and a moment later she had passed through the little ivied gate into the flower-garden beyond, and he had not then the courage to follow her.

He stayed behind, therefore, and upbraided himself fiercely. He took himself to task in a shower of genuine abuse. He absented himself from luncheon; and at dinner it took him quite a little time to make up his mind about even glancing at her when he found her on his other side. He did manage it, however, and looked so long, that she was at length obliged to notice him. After that, touched perhaps by the unhappiness of his eyes, she softened towards him, and to his intense surprise and gratitude was considerably kinder than he deserved.

The next day went smoothly, without a single hitch; and if at eleven o'clock he winced inwardly as he thought of the two who were then in all probability

amongst the pelargoniums, he was very careful not to betray it. He was happier, too, in spite of all this, than he had been for some time. Miss Charteris towards evening grew very nearly her old sweet self again. Nay, more than that. It seemed to Elston that she was softer, tenderer in her manner to him than she had ever been before; that her eyes rested on his with a more lingering regard; and once, when he unexpectedly turned his glance in her direction, he caught her looking at him, and surprised the vivid blush with which she turned aside.

His hopes rose high, and he came downstairs next morning, Wednesday, happy in the knowledge that only one more day lay between him and the fulfilment of his fondest desire. Certainly that third sin should not find him out, for the simple reason that he would not commit it. He would be calm, circumspect. It was, indeed, impossible that he should ever feel jealousy about her again.

It was perhaps a little shock to him to find George Markham at breakfast when he got down. He had arrived by an early train, and as Elston entered the room, was just saying, "How d'ye do?" to Miss Charteris. She was a girl who spoke very distinctly, and Elston could hear what she was saying. She was smiling in very friendly wise at Markham, though her manner was suspiciously reproachful.

"I thought you were never coming," she said.

"How you put it off from day to day. And when you *knew* why I wanted you."

After that, she and Markham entered into, and were apparently lost in, an engrossing discussion that lasted until breakfast—a rather prolonged meal at Hartley—was at an end.

Lord Elston could not forget that once this man had been Sophy's avowed lover. He had, indeed, according to all accounts, been her devoted slave. He looked uncommonly like a slave still—following her about and giving himself up to her, as it were, for the entire morning. Pelham, in spite of his expression and tragic powers, was nowhere. Markham monopolised her all through, getting her to show him the new fish-pond and tennis court and otherwise making himself specially disagreeable.

Miss Charteris, however, did not seem to find him disagreeable at all. She seemed, on the whole, very glad to be with him. She introduced him to Elston with quite a little flow of pleasure in her manner, and said ecstatically that it was "very nice to see two old friends of hers with each other." This was putting Markham in the same category with himself—when surely *he*, Elston, was more than a friend.

Feeling rather disconsolate after luncheon, he broke away from one or two of the other guests, who wanted him to join them in a long drive to some distant abbey, and, lighting a cigarette, wandered into one of the conservatories. Sophy, he had discovered, was not going

to this abbey, neither was Markham—a fact in itself suspicious. He was feeling distinctly gloomy as he stepped into the region of flowers, and, without giving a thought to their beauty, paced slowly up and down. It was at his second turn that his eyes, moodily lowered to the ground, fell upon an object that instantly riveted all his attention.

A letter, wide open, and written in a large, sprawling hand. The beginning was at the other side, of course, but what now caught his eye was enough.

"a moment sooner. Hurried my best. But those lawyer fellows are impossible to move. I will bring the ring, but only hope it isn't too large. It looks enormous. However, as it is my first purchase of the kind, you must forgive me if I have erred in any way.  
—Ever, dear Sophy, yours, G. MARKHAM."

The writing was so large that he read it from where he stood. He read it unconsciously. His eyes had fallen upon it and, before he was aware of it, the sense of the words had entered into his brain. What was he to do now! He was a little frightened at the strange feeling that took possession of him. It was not rage, or grief or disappointment. It was something far worse than all. He hardly realised at first that it was despair.

"Lawyers." He wondered dimly if it were her marriage settlement they were so slow about. "His first purchase of the kind." Very natural. It isn't

every day a man buys a wedding-ring. He hadn't a doubt in his mind but that it was a wedding-ring to be placed on Sophy's finger by Markham.

He was not angry *this* time. He was only cold and stunned. For the first time in all his life he was entirely without hope. He wondered in a dull sort of way that he had never until now discovered how much Sophy was to him.

He was still staring at the cruel letter, though with eyes that saw not, when Sophy herself entered the conservatory. Of course she saw the letter, and instantly stooped to pick it up.

"I seem to be dropping my possessions all over the place," she said. "My Syrian bangle in the garden half an hour ago—Good gracious! What is the matter *now?*" She had caught a glimpse of Elston's face, and it electrified her. Indeed it made a picture.

"Don't let us go into it, Sophy," he said brokenly. "Why should I distress you? It was all my own folly from first to last, I dare say. I should have seen—have known—"

"But *what?*" demanded she, as he paused; he felt indeed unequal to going on, and looked so altogether strange and downhearted that Miss Charteris was unnerved. "What is it? Tell," she said.

He pointed to the letter she still held in her hand.

"If you had only told me," he cried. "Oh, Sophy! was it then so great an amusement to you to break my heart?"

"To break—" She gazed at him, lost in perplexity. guely her eyes wandered to the letter, the word "ng" caught her eye; in a moment the whole truth shed upon her. A warm crimson sprang to her æk, and I regret to say she so far forgot herself as stamp her pretty shoe upon the tessellated pavement.

"You are really *maddening!*" she cried. "You are yond pardon." She might, and in all probability uld, have said a great deal more, had not the sound an approaching footstep checked her. She turned r head to see George Markham.

"George," she said sweetly, with a complete change tone and expression, "would you mind bringing me it—that little message I wrote to you about last ursday. Bring it *here*. Lady Hartley has it, I think. t it from her."

"Oh, the ring," said Mr. Markham; and he went ck again the way he had come, whistling idly. Miss arteris, in his absence, employed herself thrumming a rather vicious manner upon the pane nearest to r. She did not look at Elston, who was deadly ent, with an awful growing fear full upon him that had been for the third, and fatal time, mistaken!

Presently Markham returned and laid something in r hand.

"I had a battle royal to get it," he said, laughing. t appears baby lives by it alone. It is a huge suc- ss, Lady Hartley says, 'an' you love her,' don't keep long."



Still laughing, he lounged away through the outer door, down the steps and into the garden. When he was quite gone, Sophy advanced on Lord Elston. She then opened her pretty pink palm and held it out to him. A curious object lay on it.

"There is *the ring!*" she said, in a voice untranslatable.

It was a terrible thing. A hateful wormy sort of thing, made of gutta-percha; but if hideous, at least innocent—innocent, no doubt *because* hideous. It was black and soft and bendable, and big enough to fit a giant's thumb. Elston gazed at it as if fascinated, and at last, in spite of the pride that would have held him silent, was constrained to speak.

"What is it?"

"Baby's teething-ring," returned she slowly.

When she had proved to him his guilt, she did not try to leave him, but stood erect, her beautiful figure drawn up to its fullest height, a strange gravity upon her beautiful lips.

"This is the third time," she said, at last, in a low tone, as though speaking to herself. He started violently. Noticing this, she let her eyes rest more fully on him and went on slowly, "Your probation, my lord, is at an end."

"So is my life," said he.

"As for that first chance—that letter of mine—you shall see it now, as I promised."

"Oh! no, no," he said, entreating her by a gesture

not to go into that. "I understand. I submit. I am surely unfortunate enough."

She hesitated for a moment, and then said,—

"You remember our compact?"

"And all it means to me. Have I not told you so? Spare me, I beseech you, what you can."

"This is the final throw, and you have lost."

"Everything."

"All is over, then, between us?"

"All!"

She made a little impetuous movement, and he, misinterpreting it, moved to the door and flung it wide for her to pass through. With her would go all his hopes, his desires. Nothing would remain save that saddest of all things, memory.

He stood, his eyes downcast, waiting for her to go. He felt numbed, stupid; but presently it *did* dawn upon him that it was strange she should keep him so long in attendance on her. Whilst he thus mused, a voice, soft, sweet, unsteady, fell upon his ears.

"Arthur!" it said.

He let the door go and looked at her. She had covered her face with her hands and was crying quietly but bitterly. In a second she was in his arms.

"My darling! my darling!" whispered he. "Has it hurt you so much? Has it so grieved you? Oh, Sophy, do not cry like that! In time you will forget all this sad—me."

"Ah! that is just it," sobbed Miss Charteris in-

dignantly; "I can't forget you. And to think you would have let me go *for ever*, without another word—another glance—oh, I would not have *believed* it of you!"

"Sophy, do you know what you are saying? After *all*, is there a chance for me?"

He was very pale as he looked at her.

"Yes, a fourth," said she, smiling through her tears. "And then—oh, no," she cried nervously, "we won't have any more trials; I hate them. But—but you *will* try to be good now, won't you?"

"I don't think I shall ever offend you again, Sophy; I don't, indeed."

"Very well," said she. "That is a promise, mind; and now I must run away and give back this ring to Lady Hartley."

"Ah! talking of rings," said he, a little awkwardly; "there—there is something I want to say to you. On Thursday last I was so *sure* I should not fall into disgrace that I telegraphed to town, and," fumbling in his pocket, "got you this. You will wear it now, Sophy?"

"*This*" was a very exquisite ring, altogether different from that horrid black thing which had wrought such mischief.

"Oh! how lovely!" cried Miss Charteris, who was not above raptures where diamonds were concerned. "Oh, Arthur, *thank* you!"

He slipped it on her finger—the finger—and she regarded it with most satisfactory delight.

"It is I who should thank you," said he tenderly, "for deigning to accept it. But—but if *I* were to thank a person, Sophy, I should do it more warmly than you."

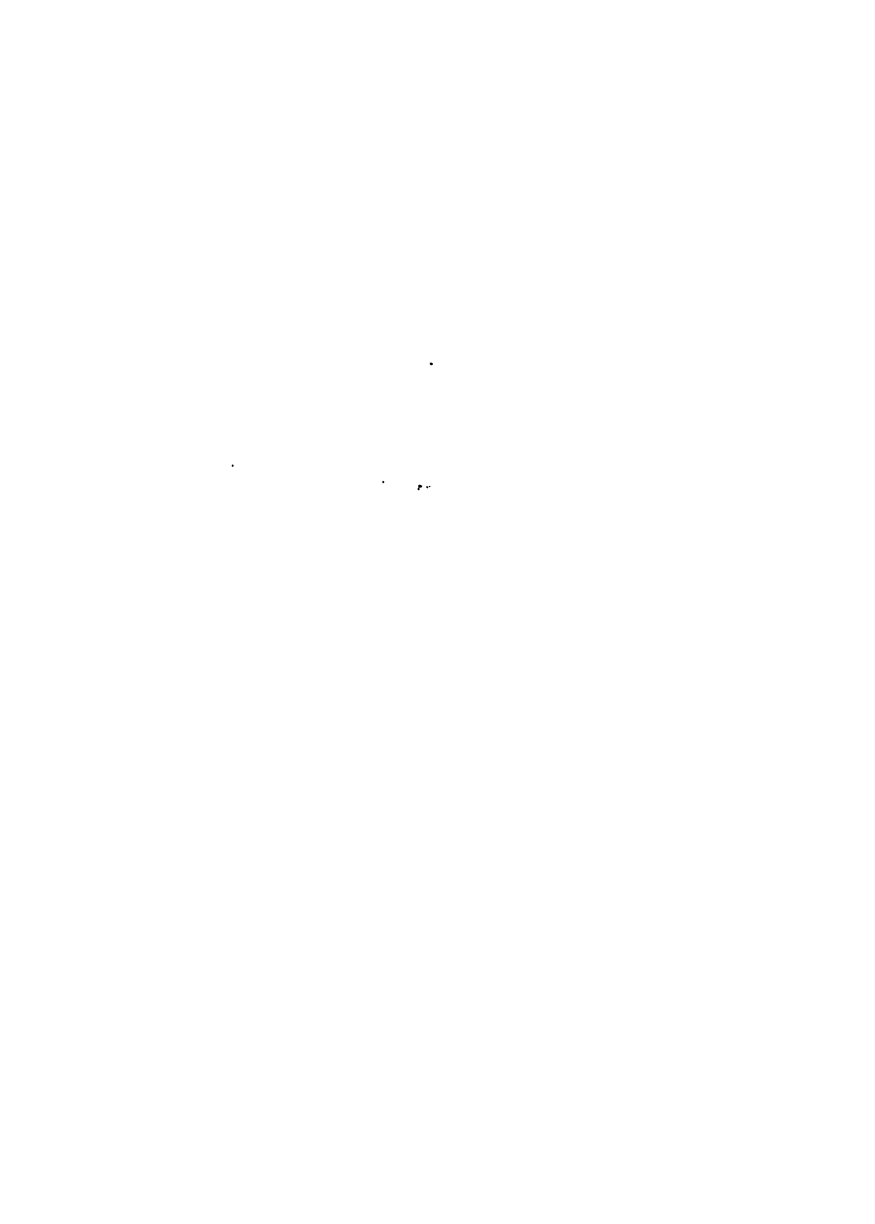
She cast a little, swift, shy glance at him and blushed crimson. She hesitated, then moved a step nearer to him, and lifted her face slightly.

It was their first kiss, but not their last.

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**“NONE SO BLIND—”**



## "NONE SO BLIND—"

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### CHAPTER I.

MISS FRENCH, having won her set in a very glorious fashion, threw her racket with a little graceful enthusiasm into the air, caught it again as gracefully as it descended, and, with a congratulatory word or two to her partner, moved with him across the shaven lawn in the direction of a shady seat that was hidden somewhere amongst the shrubberies.

"I suppose there is something in that?" said Mrs. Travers, a pretty woman of about five-and-thirty, looking after her, and flicking her fan delicately in the direction of the girl's companion.

"Impossible to say," returned Lady Synge coldly. "I should be the last one in the world to give an opinion about her acceptance or refusal of anybody, as I confess I don't understand her in the least."

"Considering that you are her cousin in some sort, and that you are not devoid of penetration, and that



she lives so much with you, that is a remarkable speech."

"True, however. As to her staying with me, she does that just as she chooses. She is too big an animal to be under any one's control, and her beauty too makes one a little afraid of her."

"Or for her?"

"Oh, certainly not. I will do her the justice to say that I believe her quite equal to the care of herself. She will not mix herself up in any imbroglio, nor will she marry beneath her. She has her own interests too much at heart for that!"

She spoke bitterly, and the other woman cast a side glance at her.

"It was an unfortunate thing that that melancholy accident put an end to Victor's chance," she said.

"*Had* he a chance?" Lady Synge's face, some still if middle-aged, clouded perceptibly as Travers mentioned her nephew's name. "A baronet with only £3000 a year! Oh, I think I can give her credit for greater prudence. That she was with him two seasons ago in the cruellest manner I admit; but that he ever had a chance of gaining her I do not believe. She is a practised coquette, and of course he was fair game. The more desirable I think he had gained a character for coldness before she lost him."

"He was frantically in love with her, at all events."

"Yes; I have no doubt she found him amusing."

always tell myself how thoroughly she must have enjoyed that victory."

"I think perhaps you wrong her a little," said her friend gravely. "There is something in her face—her eyes, is it?—or her mouth?—that precludes the idea of cruelty."

"It isn't worth an argument," said Lady Synge impatiently. She would have liked to say "she" instead of "it," but breeding forbade. "My only regret is that he should have met her *before* this terrible thing befell him. Now, behind his darkened eyes, her face lives fresh in his memory. He cannot forget her, and I cannot forgive her, in that she has added another grief to his already too mournful lot."

"Poor Victor!"

"No! Not poor! Such a word could not apply to him!" exclaimed Lady Synge hastily. "Any one with a mind so sweet, a heart so pure as his, could never be called poor!"

Then in a breath she contradicted herself. She folded her hands tightly in her lap, as with the hope of suppressing her strong emotion; a heavy sigh fell from her, and she murmured to herself in a heart-broken tone, "My poor fellow! My poor, poor boy!"

"It was the most melancholy thing I ever heard of!" exclaimed Mrs. Travers quickly, who was always nervous about witnessing emotion in others, being pretty well case-hardened herself. "With such a career before him, too! His commission flung up, and—"

"He felt *nothing* so keenly as his lost chance winning that girl," interrupted Lady Syngé, with some excitement. "His heart and soul were centred in her—nay, *are*. She is the cause of all his misery."

"Not all, surely. You are a little hard on Joa. She had nothing to do with that miserable accident in the hunting-field."

"Who shall say she hadn't? Her rejection of him made him reckless in many ways. Oh, if she had only accepted him! But, as I have said, he wasn't good enough for a girl so worldly-wise as she is."

"You would accuse her now of being mercenary and certainly she is not that. She refused, to my knowledge, many good offers since Victor proposed to her. *One* of them the best last year afforded."

"Not mercenary; I do not accuse her of that, but ambitious. She is looking for rank, no doubt. I hear that young man who was playing with her just now Lord Durnsford, was very attentive to her last Christmas at the Bellairs', and that she was at least not uncivil to him. Is it true? You go more into the world than I do; you should know."

"Yes, I also heard it," said Mrs. Travers, a touch of constraint in her tone.

"Was that why you brought him here to-day?"

Mrs. Travers flushed, and bit her lips.

"Well—perhaps," she said. "And if so, there was more kindness than cruelty towards Sir Victor in such an act. If Lord Durnsford comes to the point, Joa

will certainly accept him, as few girls, I take it, would refuse one of the oldest earldoms in England with such a rent-roll attached to it as he can offer. That would put an end for ever to any wild hopes Sir Victor still may entertain. Surely that will be a good thing for him."

"You overburden him with your kindness."

"You regard it too much from one side only," said Mrs. Travers warmly. "Some thought should be given to her. Considering the sad affliction that has befallen your nephew, surely it would be better for her to marry well than to—"

"She could not do better than marry Victor, blind though he be," persisted Lady Synge, so obstinately that Mrs. Travers, with a wisdom that was hardly to be expected of a woman, shrugged her shoulders and withdrew from the subject. It was impossible, she told herself, that she should agree with Lady Synge. If Joan, who was quite a dear friend of hers, had happened to love this poor afflicted young man, why, well and good. Love, which is charity, covers a multitude of defects; but that she did *not* love him seemed to Mrs. Travers a special interposition of Providence, and a very happy thing indeed.

She was still thinking of this when a rustle of soft garments just behind her made her turn her head. Joan Ffrench was standing at her side, but she was not looking at her—her eyes were fixed upon her cousin, Lady Synge.

She was a tall girl, with features that were strictly regular; all save the mouth, which was a trifle larger than it should be. Her eyes were soft and dark, and she was beyond doubt extremely beautiful; indeed, there were very few women who did not sink into insignificance beside her. She was thoroughly bred in her appearance, and there was something in her expression that gave one the idea that she would be perfectly able to judge for herself on even the knottiest point, without calling in the aid of her friends. But it was the faulty mouth that was her chief charm. When she smiled something grew upon it that rendered her soft, sweet, and pliant as the veriest child.

She stooped over Lady Synge's chair and patted her on the shoulder.

"Giving me 'the bastinado with your tongue,' Auntie?" she asked gaily. She always called her cousin "Auntie." "No, do not deny it. A lengthened experience has taught me that when your mouth takes that particular curve, you are saying naughty things of me."

"Where is Victor?" asked Lady Synge abruptly, taking no heed of the foregoing.

Miss Ffrench raised her brows.

"Is it a foregone conclusion that I should know where he is?" she said. "Well," with a change of tone that produced her perfect smile, "as it happens, I do. He is in the rose garden, talking to Colone!

Ashton of politics, dry as that tanned old warrior himself."

"Ah! he will be tired, bored, worn out!" cried Lady Synge, rising with her usual impetuosity to her feet. She looked at Joan with intense reproach in her eyes, and the girl smiled back at her as if amused.

"You could at least have prevented that," said Lady Synge.

Miss Ffrench shrugged her shoulders. It was a trick of hers, and she did it very charmingly, but she said nothing. Lord Durnsford, who was with her, and who saw the shrug, smiled discreetly.

"By Jove! she evidently expects you to play the keeper to Sir Victor," he said, in a whisper, as though such expectation were one of the greatest jokes extant. "Bound to look after him, eh? and deliver him out of bondage on all occasions. A rather absurd notion, eh?"

His manner towards Miss Ffrench as a rule was absolutely servile, yet just now he found he was unhappy enough to have in some unknown way offended her.

"Why absurd?" she asked, in a tone that froze him, and killed the insipid smile upon his lips. She wept him with a glance, and then turned abruptly away from him, and to Lady Synge.

"I am off to the rescue," she said gaily. "I shall bring back Sir Victor, I promise you, dead or alive. Wish me luck in my hazardous enterprise. Consider

how many times the Colonel has been under fire, and how seldom I."

Here Mrs. Travers laughed a little satirically.

"How, then?" demanded Miss Ffrench, turning to her.

"Why, there are fires and fires," said she, with a comical glance. "But," making an imperceptible gesture towards Lady Synge, who was looking anxious, as she dwelt on her "poor fellow" being thus given up to the cruel mercies of a doting old Indian officer, "if you indeed mean a rescue, why *go*. But when you *have* carried off your prey—what then?" There was considerable meaning in her voice. Miss Ffrench reflected for a moment.

"That's the worry of it," she said. "One seldom knows what to do with one's captive. Well—as you put it to me—read to him as usual, I suppose, now that our neighbours have kindly made up their minds, *at last*, to go home. What a trial these afternoons are in the country!—What! going so soon, dear Lady Primrose? Why it is quite early yet. Ah, well—good-bye! Yes, he likes being read to, doesn't he, Auntie?"

"He likes you to read to him," replied Lady Synge, in an uncompromising tone.

"Consider it done, then," said her lovely cousin, with a sprightly air. She moved away from the group minus an attendant, the discomfited Earl being too depressed after his late snubbing to dare offer himself as an escort.

Mrs. Travers as she passed her stopped her for a moment.

"*Why* do you read to him?" she asked, with a suspicion of censure in her manner.

"Ah! that is just what I so much wish I knew myself," responded she, with a careless laugh.

Here two figures emerging from the laurustinas on their left caught and held all their attention. One was a tall young man of about twenty-nine. He walked somewhat deliberately, and leant as he went on his companion's arm. He was singularly handsome, if rather emaciated in appearance, and his eyes, wide open, were large and dark. They seldom moved, however, and one might remark that their lids did not cover and uncover them with the nervous frequency of those who see. Otherwise, one could hardly imagine him sightless; yet, alas! dark as were those beautiful eyes, their vision was darker still.

He was putting in a word here and there in his companion's voluble flow of political platitudes, but he was evidently without interest in the subject under discussion. His attention seemed indeed a trifle strained, as though he were listening intently for some sound or thing that lay well outside the Colonel's prosy talk, and that might come to him at any moment. There was upon his face that sad look of expectancy that characterises the newly blind.

Miss Ffrench went up to him and touched his arm. He started violently, and on the instant his whole ex-



pression changed. The melancholy forsook it, a smile radiant as her own lit his whole face. It touched whatever heart she had, or permitted herself to have, and with a view to overcoming her own emotion (which annoyed her) she put on her liveliest air.

"They have all gone, Victor," she said. "*Such* a pity, eh? If they could have fully sounded the depth of our grief at their departure, I doubt not at all these dear neighbours of ours would have gone a little sooner."

"You are smiling," said the blind man softly. "I can know *that*, at least. After all, I have some small mercies left me. I know how you look when you smile."

She frowned slightly, as if hurt; but this happily was unknown to him. In a moment she had recovered herself.

"Auntie is miserable about you," she said lightly. The old Colonel had beaten an early retreat. "And you know of old when she is miserable about *you*, she consoles herself by abusing *me*. Come, then, let me read to you, and save me from her wrath."

"Ah! *will* you?" He spoke eagerly, but almost immediately checked himself. "You are very good," he said,—"*too good to a poor fellow like me, but I must not accept your offer. With so many guests in the house—to give so much time to me—it is out of the question.*" Then suddenly he put out his hand and touched her. He could not see; but as it happened it

is her arm, just below the elbow, that he caught. She had drawn off her long gloves to play that last set, and the pretty soft rounded arm was bare. His fingers crept under it tenderly, and a swift flush rose to his cheek. "No! do not take me at my word," he said hurriedly. "I cannot resign this pleasure you would give me."

Miss Ffrench patted the hand resting on her arm, in the airiest fashion, and then as airily displaced it from its desirable position.

"Pouf," she said; "to be too punctilious is to lose the salt of life. I feel I have done my duty by your auntie's guests for *one* day. Come, give me my reward. I am tired, and to sit in a shady room and read aloud a favourite poem or two will rest me. To read to you especially, as you are ever an appreciative audience."

This, coming from another woman, might savour of encouragement; but Miss Ffrench was clever, and contrived to insert into her tone a touch of absolute indifference that utterly destroyed the sweetness of the words. He sighed involuntarily, and followed her indoors to a cosy little room, half library, half boudoir, where he sank with a rather exhausted air upon a lounge.

She looked at him sharply.

"You don't grow stronger," she said.

"Oh! I hope not," he returned wearily.

"What an absurd answer!" She spoke angrily, and threw the book she held, upon the table near her, with

rather unnecessary violence. "Your affliction is of course great, but you are not the only one; others have endured it. Surely your strength is as good as theirs."

"As good—so far. . But to be blind is not the worst thing that can befall a man."

It was impossible that she should misunderstand him.

"From you," she said, growing extremely pale, "such a speech as that is crueller than it could ever be from another. Considering all that has come and gone between us, you might have spared me that."

"Considering all—you speak of—you might have judged me more justly. *Could* I think one unkind thought of you? And do you believe I have not measured the gulf that now divides us? In my best days I was nothing to you, and now—"

"Yes, yes. I was hasty. I wronged you," said she hurriedly.

"You are an angel to bear with the whims and fancies of a poor wretch like me." Then he held out his hand to where he might reasonably suppose she was sitting. "Give me your hand," he said. "That sweet pledge I once strove to win from you, to have and to hold for ever, you will surely not refuse to *lend* me now, in this my evillest hour."

She pushed back her chair and rose abruptly.

"No, no," she said. "Think me cruel, unfeeling, if you will, but believe me it is for the best."

As you will," he said gently. "And now for this  
ng you have promised."

Miss Ffrench, who was, in spite of herself, disturbed,  
ded him intently for a while, then turned abruptly  
, and, happy in the mournful knowledge that he  
l not see her, she pressed her hand convulsively  
st her eyes. If by this means she pressed back  
unwelcome tears, was known only to herself. When  
spoke there was not the faintest trace of emotion  
or clear fresh voice.

Well, what shall it be?" she said. "What have  
ere?" She took up a book at random from the  
. "Swinburne, eh? He is the least little bit too  
mental for me, I confess; but I'll try something.  
first thing I open at—"

She gave a careless glance at the page before her,  
began—

"Let us go hence, my songs: she will not hear.  
Let us go hence together without fear;  
Keep silence now, for singing-time is over,  
And over all old things and all things dear.  
She loves not you nor me as all we love her.  
Yea, though we sang as angels in her ear,  
She would not hear.

"Let us go hence, go hence: she will not see.  
Sing all once more together; surely she,  
She too, remembering days and words that were,  
Will turn a little towards us, sighing; but we,  
We are hence, we are gone, as though we had not  
been there,  
Nay, and though all men seeing had pity on me,  
She would not see.'

"What folly it all is?" she cried irritably, flinging the book aside. "Why not have something more wholesome than that, if you must have poetry? Pshaw! to think of any man, *calling* himself a man, wasting so much breath over a creature devoid of feeling."

He was silent.

"Why do you not speak?" she cried angrily. "Perhaps you think my censure falls upon myself. Am *I* such a creature? Have *I* no feeling?"

"You have more than most, I think. That is why I love you." He spoke quite calmly, and as though it were a very ordinary thought with him. "And as for that other of whom you have been reading, who shall say that she felt for no one? To that one man perhaps she was dead; but to another—Joan"—his tone grew low and eager—"tell me one thing. Are you going to marry Durnsford? A whisper—a suspicion of it has been conveyed to me."

"A very unstable whisper."

"You deny it, then?"

His breath came quickly; he leant towards her, a very world of hope in his sightless face. It crushed her. She rose and drew back a step or two, laying her hand upon a chair near her as if to steady herself.

"There is no need for denial," she said. "Lord Durnsford has not done me the honour to ask me—yet!"

She did great violence to her feelings when she spoke that "yet," but she felt it her duty to do it. To

ceive him, even in so legitimate a matter, was more than she could compass. Contrary to her expectations and her fears, however, he took it very calmly.

"I see—I quite understand," he said. "I have robbed you as I should not have done, and you have borne with me as I believe no other woman could. And—do not feel sorrow for me, Joan. That I love you is my one undying joy. Now go on with our reading, and choose this time something a little less sad. Forget this folly of mine—forget all save, though I am always helpless, I am still your cousin and your friend."

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## CHAPTER II.

IN the reception-rooms outside, where the people were moving to and fro, or standing in little groups to criticise the music, the lights were brilliant; but in this small flower-filled room the lamps burned low, shedding a soft rich crimson flood of radiance on the low divans and gleaming statuettes. The breath of dying roses filled the apartment; the last exquisite tones of a celebrated singer had ceased upon the air. There was absolute silence, save for the impassioned accents of a man who, leaning against a marble pillar, was gazing down eagerly upon the girl beneath. It was Lord Durnsford.

Miss Ffrench lay back in a fauteuil. She was looking indescribably lovely, but with a face as white as her gown. The latter was of ivory satin, unrelieved by colour of any sort, if one excepted the tiny sparks of many colours that flashed from the diamond band that encircled her neck, and from the diamond star that lay half hidden in her hair. Of any other ornaments she was guiltless. Her eyes were lowered, and she held upon her knee a large white fan, round which her fingers had closed with rather unwonted force.

Lord Durnsford was speaking in an eager, disconnected fashion.

"It is hardly necessary to say it—is it? You must have known—have seen—for so long. To say now that I love you, seems to say—so little. Joan!—you are listening. You do not forbid me to go on!"

He waited a moment, during which her lips grew whiter, and her fingers closed even more tightly on the luckless fan. It broke.

"Why should I forbid you?" she said at last coldly, but very distinctly.

The light of triumph shot into his eyes.

"Do you know what that means? You accept me, then—at last!"

He put out his hand to take hers, but with a little stifled exclamation she rose to her feet, and going quickly to the open window, flung back the silken curtain and let the moonlight stream into the room. As she stood there, leaning rather heavily against the framework, he could see that her face was white as death.

"What is it? You are faint?" he exclaimed anxiously.

"No—no, indeed; it is nothing. But that room inside—it was suffocating."

She looked at him as she spoke, and compelled a shadow of a smile to her lips.

"You are sure you are well?"

"Quite well."



"Give me my answer, then," he entreated. "Joan, you will marry me?"

She hesitated—even then. It was, however, a very momentary hesitation; one little word and she would be a countess—the richest in England; and yet—and yet—the little word was said nevertheless.

"Yes," she answered, in a low tone.

He put out his arm as if to draw her to him, but she shrank away and turned her face to the deserted room within, as if seeking for escape. In her large brilliant eyes there was a curious hunted expression.

At this moment, as though in answer to her secret desire, two people strolled into the room, talking briskly.

"Ah!—Captain Greville!" cried Miss Ffrench, in her soft *trainante* voice. She went up to him with a certain *empressement* that made Greville's heart (who had loved her from afar many a month) beat with unpleasant haste. "You, too, then, have discovered this cosiest nook in all the world. See, Lord Durnsford and I have let the moonlight in upon it—one more charm added, we thought; eh?"

A little excitable laugh broke from her. She swept past him without waiting for an answer, to the open doorway that led into the reception-room beyond, Lord Durnsford accompanying her.

"I shall go home," she said gently. "Do you think you can take me to Mrs. Travers? I feel very tired."

"You are too pale, indeed. To-morrow then. May I call?"

"To-morrow?—Yes. But until then"—she regarded him earnestly—"you will give me your word to mention nothing of what has passed between us to-night?"

"Certainly," replied he gravely.

She found Mrs. Travers presently and induced her to leave, although the night was still young. She was so pale, so silent, on the way home, that Mrs. Travers, who was a born diplomatist, guessed how matters stood at once, and had it all out of her in less than seven minutes.

"You lucky girl!" she cried; "to land *the* event of the season. My congratulations come from my heart. Bless me!—won't Bella feel anyhow when she hears of it! You will be the envy of hundreds, let me tell you—a fact sufficient in itself to make any well-regulated girl happy for life."

"Well, I can't say I feel specially happy," said Joan, in a rather depressed tone.

"More shame for you then," returned her sprightly friend, who indeed had small patience with such ingratitude towards a kindly fate. "Now I do hope you are not going to be silly about want of love, etc. All that sort of nonsense is exploded long ago. And a good thing, too! When you have been married to him for six months you will adore him—*because* he loves you. I know all about it. I've seen dozens of girls married who hadn't a spark of affection for their husbands, and they'd be awfully mad if you told them so now. And Durnsford is specially unobjectionable. Very

desirable indeed in many little ways. I expect you will have a real good time with him; a better time than most. Oh! if I had only had your chance, how I should have jumped with joy!"

"Is that entirely true? Would you give up Harry to be Lady Durnsford?"

Mrs. Travers laughed.

"Oh!—*Harry!*" she said. "Harry is *such* a fool! And besides, you trench on delicate ground, my good child. Would you have me give him up *now*, after all these years of married bliss! Think what the world would say."

"Oh! you know what I mean. No, you loved Harry. You may call him a fool, but you don't mean it. And even so as it seems to me, it would be better to marry a fool than any other man, provided you loved him."

"You are younger than you look," said Mrs. Travers, with fine contempt.

Here they arrived at the house in Park Lane, so that perforce the discussion came to an end, never, as it happened, to be renewed. On a salver in the hall they found some letters awaiting them that had come by the latest post, and taking them up, they went into the morning-room with them, which was well lighted.

The handwriting being unknown to her, Miss Ffrench opened the first of hers lazily; she scanned its contents, and suddenly a low but terrible cry broke from her.

Mrs. Travers, looking up hurriedly, was a good deal frightened by her expression. She stood at the table, white and shivering.

"He is dying!" she cried sharply.

"Dying!—Who? Durnsford?" asked Mrs. Travers aghast, whose mind just then ran upon one man only.

"Oh, no; no, no! Would to Heaven it were! But Victor—Victor!" She sank into a chair, and letting her arms fall prone upon the table, buried her face on them. "See!" she said, pushing the letter towards her friend without looking up.

Mrs. Travers took it. The writing was altogether unlike the clear caligraphy on the envelope. It was indeed wild and straggling—the writing of one not only blind, but past all strength. There was a tragical look about it that frightened her, and with that and the irregularities of the hand it took her quite a minute to read it through. It ran as follows:—

"After all it was of no use. They tell me I have not many hours to live. But I could not go from you *for ever*, my love, my darling, without one word. They tell me you are going to marry him. It is this then: That I pray God to bless you every hour of your life. But in all the happy years that lie before you, do not *quite* forget me.

VICTOR."

"What a *fiasco*!" was Mrs. Travers' first thought. Her second—how to successfully manage the affair.

She therefore read the note over again, with a view to giving herself time.

"Oh, it can't be altogether so bad," she said, hardly knowing what to say. "He is very incoherent, and probably thinks himself weaker than he is." She glanced again at the letter—"‘After all it was of no use.’—*What* was of no use, I wonder? Poor fellow! He was a little off his head, no doubt, and imagined himself worse than usual."

Her voice roused Joan. She stood up, and raising both arms, pushed back the hair from her forehead. Her face was ghastly, and her eyes shone like stars. She looked terrible with her miserable face and her gay attire—the rich ivory satin and the gleaming diamonds.

"But one thing could make it worse," she said. "No, there is no doubt. He is dying. Dying—and *alone!*" She caught her breath quickly. "You know Auntie is laid up in that house in Cheshire. There is no one with him. "Oh! to be dying, without a friend near. It is horrible—horrible!"

She began to pace up and down the room in a wild, excitable way, but presently came to a standstill before Mrs. Travers.

"I shall go to him," she said abruptly.

"Joan!—impossible!"

"Why is it impossible? It shall not be so."

"For one thing, because, as you have just said, he is alone. Your going would compromise you. Think

what the world would say. Think of Lord Durnsford."

"I can think only of Victor. Nothing shall prevent my going to him—nothing, nothing!" She tore off her long white gloves and threw them on the table. "When does the next train go?" she asked feverishly.

"If you take this step you will imperil your reputation!" cried Mrs. Travers angrily. "One can't do odd things of this kind without being talked about. And *you*—who are so proud—how will you like that?"

"If to go to a dying cousin is to imperil one's reputation—"

"To go to a dying lover, rather. All the world knew of his infatuation."

"If the fact of his having loved me will militate against me, so be it then. Oh, how he *did* love me!" she cried, with a burst of anguish.

"And your engagement to Lord Durnsford?"

"That is all over now. I shall never marry him—I shall never marry any one." She had again been walking up and down, as though to be quiet was impossible to her, and now again she stopped. "Listen to me," she said. "I may as well tell you all now. I—"  
—clasping her hands and lifting her beautiful, haggard face—"for two long years I fought against it; I *would* not believe it! I *swore* to myself that it was not so—but now—*now*, I know. I lied to myself. That letter"—crumpling it up feverishly in her hot,

slender fingers—"has taught me that I love him, as I never have, as I never can love another!"

"Joan!—I think," said Mrs. Travers coldly, "that, considering all that has happened this evening, it is a little too late to—"

The girl threw out her hands wildly.

"Oh, those terrible words! Oh, no! it *cannot* be too late!" she cried, catching the sound, not the spirit, of her companion's speech. "Oh, Claudia, if you ever loved me, help me now!" She glanced at the clock. "It is already two," she said. "When does the next train go?"

"There is one at six, I believe," replied Mrs. Travers sulkily.

"Not before that?—not until four long hours have gone? Think, dear Claudia, think! There must be a train, even an hour, *one* hour earlier. Where is your book, your guide? Dear Heaven! how much can happen in four hours!"

"Do you know that you are extremely selfish?" cried Mrs. Travers, the more wrathfully in that she felt she was going to give in. "You look only on one side of the question. You do not consider Durnsford; and as for me—how am I to account to Lady Synge for this mad freak of yours?"

"You are right. I am selfish," said the girl wretchedly.

She looked round her in a vague, hopeless way, and then suddenly burst into a passion of tears.

Of course when she saw her crying, Mrs. Travers

rgave her. She went to her and put her arms und her.

"See, now," she said; "to be able to write at all, oves that he can't be so *very* bad. Come upstairs th me and let me help you to change your dress. I resay we shall find plenty to do before we start."

"We?"

"Of course I shall go with you," said Mrs. Travers rtuously. "Do you imagine I should let you undertake questionable affair of this kind without a chaperon?"

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## CHAPTER III.

THEY got there about eight o'clock the same morning. As they mounted the steps of Sir Victor's house Mrs. Travers cast a hurried look at Joan, and seeing that she was quite incapable of taking the initiative in any way, that she was indeed on the point of fainting, went quickly forward as a servant opened the door. Her own heart began to beat wildly as she considered that this man might have the word "death" upon his lips.

"How is Sir Victor?" faltered Mrs. Travers at last.

"Well, M'—no worse, thank God," said the man earnestly.

Joan burst into tears. The servant stepped aside as a tall, lean, elderly gentleman came down the hall, who Mrs. Travers recognised as the celebrated physician Sir Sampson Baker. She went eagerly up to him, whilst Joan, overcome, sank upon one of the hall chairs.

"Is there hope?" cried Mrs. Travers, clasping the Doctor's hand.

"Why, yes, my dear madam. Even I will venture to say a *strong* hope. He has got through the night admirably. Better even than I expected. You have come to stay, eh? Quite right; quite right. Some one

to cheer him is what he will want from this out. His sister?"—casting a sharp glance at Joan.

"His cousins," said Mrs. Travers, with quite a long stress on the plural. She took this new relationship upon her in the easiest manner possible. "You see, Lady Synge being ill in Cheshire and unable to move, she was naturally anxious that we should come down and supply her place as well as we could."

"Yes, yes. It was a very unfortunate thing her being invalided just now, as, Sir Victor's eyes being in a fit state for the operation, we were quite afraid to let it go any further."

"His eyes? Is there hope of recovery there? Was there an operation?" exclaimed Mrs. Travers in astonishment.

"Dear me! I fancied you knew. Why, yes. And a very successful operation, I trust, now his strength is returning; but I warn you it is quite a touch-and-go matter, as yet. We must be cautious, you see—extremely cautious."

"To think we should not have heard!"

"He kept it entirely secret, poor fellow, lest it should prove a failure. He was very nervous about it. Lady Synge alone knew, and I thought she might have told you. Not that I had the least idea until now that you were a cousin of his."

"Could we—I—see him?" asked Mrs. Travers, turning the subject adroitly.

"Well—really—he has had such an excellent night.

What do you say, Nurse?" asked Sir Sampson, addressing a tall, pale young woman who now appeared in the background. He whispered a few words to her. She then inquired the names of the two ladies, and having withdrawn, presently returned again.

"If you will come this way, Madam," she said, addressing Mrs. Travers, "you can see him. I have prepared him in a measure, but he seemed a little unnerved. I mentioned your names, and I would earnestly enjoin quiet on you."

"You hear, Joan?" said Mrs. Travers. She pushed the girl forward. "Go," she said.

The Nurse and Doctor looked both a little surprised. The former, noting the pallor that distinguished Miss Ffrench's face, said gently,—

"The one thing we have principally to guard against is excitement. You will remember that?"

"I shall remember," said Joan.

The Nurse stopped and threw open a door with the softest touch possible. After that she stepped back into the corridor, and Joan entered the room alone. The light in it was very subdued, all the curtains being drawn, and for a moment she felt bewildered. Then she looked round her fearfully.

He was lying on his side, and there was a delicate white bandage across his eyes. When she saw him all fear died from her, and she crossed the room with a swift, light step, and took the hand that was lying on the counterpane and pressed it to her bosom.

"Victor," she whispered tremulously.

She felt his hand vibrate within her own.

"It *is* true, then?" he said. "You have come." He spoke in a tone so low, so feeble, that she had to stoop over him to hear. "I never expected *that*. But here is no one like you."

"When I got your letter," she said, "I felt that I could not stay away."

"I should apologise to you for that—only I can't. It is so good to know you are here. I brought you under false pretences, I am afraid. You have heard what they say now?"

"Yes—yes. Thank God."

"And that I may get back my sight?"

"That you *certainly* will get it back. Yes, I have heard all. But you must be careful. You must not talk."

She started up as if frightened.

"Oh, don't go," he entreated eagerly. He clung to her hand. "For the little time you will be here, don't leave me." Then anxiously, "How long can you stay?"

Miss French, without removing her hand from his, pulled a chair towards her and sat down.

"Mrs. Travers came with me," she said. "And," smiling, "we thought, if you would invite us, that we would stay a day or two to make sure that all was well with you."

She waited for a reply, but none came. He pressed her hand feebly, and a sigh broke from him.

"I am too happy," he whispered at last. Then,

after a bit: "You think that a strange speech from me to you, after— But I have learned to reconcile myself to many things." The shade that fell upon his face as he said this did not however agree with his words. "You have made up your mind about Durnsford?" he said.

She hesitated, and grew confused.

"Yes," she said nervously.

He sighed.

"When do you marry him?"

"Oh!—*Never!*" she cried impetuously.

"Never! How is that?" He started violently, and she felt the fingers clasped round hers tighten their grasp. "Speak!" he said.

Still she hesitated; then went on hurriedly, in a pretty, shame-faced fashion,—

"Last night he proposed to me, and I accepted him. . . . Then I went home and found your letter. . . . I," with a swift blush, "knew then that I should never marry him—*never!*"

She rose quickly as she made an end of this confession, and tried to release her hand from his. Gently, however; she could not try *very* hard, he was so weak.

"Joan, sit down again; don't go!" entreated he.

"But indeed I must, for your own good. The Nurse will be angry with me. Specially she said you were to beware of all excitement, and now there is quite a flush upon your face; you are not half so pale as when I first came in."

"That shows what good you have done me." And indeed his voice was wonderfully stronger. "Besides, you do not excite me," he went on fondly—"you give me rather rest and peace, and content. Ah! there is nothing like hope for medicine."

"What is your hope now?" asked she, with a little sigh.

"To get well and strong, and marry you."

"You have arranged it all your own way, certainly."

"But my way is your way now, isn't it?" whispered she, rather anxiously.

Perhaps she was afraid of that excitement she made mention of a while ago, because she surrendered without other struggle.

"I suppose so!" she said, very gently.

He made an attempt to draw her to him. She pushed again—an exquisite carmine this time—but she obeyed the weak command and stooped over him, and kissed him.

"My beloved!" murmured he.

When some time had gone by she said,—

"I hope Auntie will be satisfied now; and will take me back into her good graces. I have had a very bad time of it with her since—"

"Go on. I can bear it *now*. Since—you refused me!"

"I think I shall run down to Cheshire and tell her about it."

"Oh, no; *don't!* Something tells me I shall get ill again directly you go. You can write it, can't you? She is ever so much better, and good news of this kind is just the thing to pull her round at once. And *such* good news—" He ceased, as if too happy to go on; and then—"I wish I could see you," he said. "Oh! the joy of thinking I shall—*soon*, after two interminable years. Are you changed, darling?"

"I don't know. Not very much, I suppose."

"What are you wearing? What colour, I mean?"

"I don't know that either," said she, laughing. "It is one of those queer faded shades that every one raves about. It is neither white, nor blue, nor green. If you like," said she shyly, "I will put it away, and keep it to show you when your eyes are well again, that you may know just how I looked to-day. But indeed I have prettier gowns; and if I had known that you— But I was in such a hurry, and—*so* unhappy." Her voice broke a little.

At this moment the Nurse came in.

"I think, Madam—" she began gently.

"Oh, yes!—and so do I!" cried Miss Ffrench, rising nervously. "I only *hope* I haven't stayed too long,—that I haven't done him any harm."

"I think not," said the kind Nurse, with a little sympathetic smile, after she had had one glance at the invalid.

He grew quite strong after a while, and got back

t too, and they were married, and were—nay,  
happy as any two people who ever lived on

is always a little proud of the fact that she had  
p her mind to marry him, even before she knew  
possible that his sight might be restored.

etimes he still talks of it to her.

' you know," he said to her the other day,  
month after the son was born, "I think it was  
' pluckiest thing of you! Women will do a good  
know; but to marry a blind man—"

u were never so blind as I was," interrupted  
ily. "Just imagine, that I never saw until then  
was in love with you! 'None so blind,' you  
as those who *won't* see!"

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“THAT NIGHT IN JUNE.”



## “THAT NIGHT IN JUNE.”

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“WHAT a charming day, grandmamma!” says Mr. Wilding, walking into the small morning-room in Penywern Road, South Kensington, and directing a genial glance at the faded remains of what once was beauty, reposing in an antiquated arm-chair.

It *is* a charming day. Outside, the sun is beating heavily on road and house, and such luckless beings as must walk abroad. The whole earth is bowing before its majesty, going humbly, and imploring with faint gasps a breath of air. Inside, the blinds are all pulled down as though to exclude it, and in the grate a fire—an actual, roaring, maddening fire—is burning.

“Charming is it?” says grandmamma, declining to see the geniality of her visitor. “*Can* Nature produce a charming day in this age? *I* think it chilly.”

She is sitting with her knees well into the fire, and with the grim expression that usually greets her grandson's approach upon her withered lips.

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"Why not try a foot-warmer and a fur cloak?" says Mr. Wilding, furtively wiping his brow. "You don't take half care of yourself; and really during the present inclemency—"

"May I ask what has brought you here to-day?" interrupts she, with an amount of ungraciousness difficult to combat. But he is accustomed to her incivility; and as Hecuba is nothing to him, and he is less to Hecuba, he hardly takes it to heart.

"An overpowering desire to see you," he replies indolently, but with an admirable assumption of amiability.

"Pray spare your gibes when addressing me," says the old lady tartly. "Keep them for your unfortunate clients, if you have any. Something besides a dutiful consideration for my welfare has brought you here to-day. What is it?"

"What an intelligent person you are, grandmamma," murmurs he languidly, with what is meant for enthusiasm, but ends in sarcasm. "Concealment with you is impossible. Another—but, of course, a very secondary—motive *has* brought me here this morning. The fact is, I have some stalls for the opera, and I thought perhaps Brenda might like to hear Patti again."

"And to hear her with you alone! Certainly not! Nothing of the sort," says Lady Molyneux, with emphasis. "If that is your mission, George, it is unsuccessful. I shall never give my consent."

"I never dreamt you would," replies the prudent

George, who *had* dreamt it fondly, nevertheless. Josephine will come with us. You can scarcely object to trusting her with her married sister."

"Humph, José? I always say José is only half married, that man makes such a fool of her."

"And even if José were not in question, why should he not come with me alone?" pursues he, his foot on the fender, his eyes on the repellent old face, so lined and seared with age and querulous discontent. "Surely my cousin may count as a brother any day."

"May it? I don't think so. I cannot say how society may regard it in these indecent days, but, in any time, one relative was never mistaken for another. Besides, there are cousins *and* cousins."

"And which am I?" asks he, with so much carelessness indifference as stings her.

"You are your father's son," replies she bitterly. "No one of the blood ever came to good."

"I can't say you are over civil," returns he, with a little insolent shrug; and then the door opens, and Brenda herself enters quickly, and with the unpremeditated manner of one who anticipates an empty room. Seeing George, she starts perceptibly, smiles involuntarily, and blushes beautifully.

She is a very pretty girl, of middle height, with large dark eyes shaded by lengthy lashes, a *riante* mouth, and the dearest little nose in the world.

"Ha! Brenda," says grandmamma, looking round—the blush and ready smile have faded by this time,

and are a secret between her and her cousin—"come here."

The girl, having shaken hands with George in a calm, orthodox fashion, goes up to Lady Molyneux's chair, and, standing behind her, leans on the top of it. So standing, her face is hidden from grandmamma.

"I have some tickets for to-night. I want grandmamma to let you come and hear Patti," repeats Wilding coldly.

Miss Molyneux is preparing to go into ecstasies over this news, when she is stopped by a vigorous gesture of the hand and a frown from her cousin. Changing her *rôle* on the spot, she says indifferently,—

"I have seen Patti so often. It is good of you, George, to think of me, but really—"

"Eh!" says grandmamma, making a praiseworthy but utterly hopeless effort to turn her neck so as to see the flower-like face bending over her chair. "What is it you say? Not *care*? I beg, Brenda, you will not try to copy the *blasé* airs that distinguish, and render obnoxious, the youth of to-day. I think you *ought* to go. The tickets are bought, and I object to extravagance. Certainly you should go, if it were not for Disney. Is it that you think he would object?" anxiously.

"I was not thinking of Lord Disney," says the girl proudly.

Wilding is staring very hard at her, and she lowers her eyes, and flushes hotly—she scarcely knows why.

Perhaps she fears he may see the repugnance, and de-  
estation, and deep grief that disfigure the beauty of  
her face.

"Even if Brenda is to marry Lord Disney," says  
Wilding calmly, carefully particular about giving him  
his formal title, "I do not see—"

"If," interrupts the old dame fiercely; "if in-  
deed!"

"Dost thou answer me with 'ifs'?" says Wilding in  
a low tone to his cousin, who returns his glance with a  
faint, a *very* faint smile.

"Of course she will marry him," goes on grand-  
mamma shrilly. "What! throw even a doubt upon an  
engagement that has lasted since Brenda was fifteen!  
An engagement so admirable, so suitable, so splendid  
with regard to settlements! It is like you, George, to  
disregard its importance. A girl without a penny; like  
a father, like son; reckless—reckless!"

"Do you think he will break this suitable engage-  
ment if Brenda goes to the Opera with her sister?"  
asks Wilding, in an impossible tone.

"I don't know, I'm sure, what he may think of it,"  
says grandmamma perplexed. "You see Disney in many  
ways is—is—eccentric."

"He would be, you know, at his age," says Wilding  
lowly.

"What do you mean, George?"

"I mean eccentricity generally accompanies old age,"  
says Wilding obstinately.



"He is not old. Certainly not *old*. He is just in his prime."

"So difficult to define that word 'prime,'" murmurs he provokingly. "But of course I erred. He can't be old. He is even younger than *you*, grandmamma!"

"Perhaps, after all, I may as well see Patti again before the season closes," puts in Brenda lightly. "As you seem to advise my going, grandmamma, I shall accept George's offer."

"Well, be sure you take my latch-key: I can't have my servants kept up all night," says Lady Molyneux, determined to sustain her unamiability to its dreary end. "Half-past ten is my hour. And as José will be with you, you can let yourself in and go to bed, for one night without assistance. Core hates late hours."

As Core, her ladyship's maid, is virtually mistress of the house, tyrannising even over the tyrant grandmamma, every one sees the sense of this remark.

"I sha'n't forget, dear," says Brenda, straightening Lady Molyneux's cap, which has gone somewhat awry during the heat of argument.

"Then I suppose the matter has arranged itself," says Wilding quietly. "Good-bye, grandmamma. I shall see you to-night, Brenda," holding out his hand. She gives him hers, and raises, to his, eyes luminous and glad. She does not care to conceal from him the satisfaction that warms her heart as she dwells upon the pleasure that lies before her. Perhaps she hardly knows how dangerously sweet that pleasure is. Is it

indeed Patti, or George Wilding's voice, she likes best to hear? She has promised to marry Disney, and she will marry him, of course, that is quite settled. Nothing can alter *that*; but just now—now—for a little while out of all her life, why not be happy?

And José will be with her. Dear José! Nothing can be sweeter than José! Once or twice before she has gone to the Opera with her and George, and she has always been so engrossed with the music and so deaf to all other sounds, and so absolutely determined not to enter into conversation of any sort, with any one, that Brenda and George might as well have been alone.

"Yes, to-night," she says softly, and smiles at him again, and sends him away outwardly calm, but with a heart that curses fate and grandmamma, and, above all, Lord Disney.

At the appointed hour he calls for her, and at his command she descends the stairs beneath the gas-light, clad in her prettiest gown, with a soft blue cashmere cloak around her, and on her head the daintiest of swansdown hoods, from which her eyes look out, dark and misty and loving. Her hair is roaming at its own sweet will across her low broad forehead, her colour is somewhat heightened, altogether she looks distractingly pretty as she steps into the night brougham, and they drive away to Cromwell Road to take up José.

Alas! José is not to be taken up! (the expression of sorrow is all my own); upon the stairs, with a huge white fleecy shawl twisted round her unhappy head, she stands, "like Niobe, all tears."

"It is toothache," she exclaims, in muffled tones. That fiend amongst pains has laid hold of her, and having her safely in his clutches, refuses to release her without a heavy fine. Fred—her husband—has gone for a dentist to extract this fine. "And of course it is dreadful, darling, really quite too dreadful, but you see I *can't* go; so George must have sole charge of you to-night."

"Grandmamma will be so angry," says Brenda nervously.

"Why need she know? Grandmamma is an old bore," says José, with heartfelt meaning. She is very young, and is a person of undeniable spirit; and, as a fact, regards grandmamma with irreverence, and Lord Disney with disgust and openest disdain. "She will never find it out," she goes on as cheerfully as the fiend in possession will permit her. "If *I* had listened to all her crotchets and world-worn theories, a year ago, I shouldn't be married to Fred now. Oh, dear! oh, dear! will he *never* come? This pain is maddening. There, go away, you two. And take great care of her, George. And bring her home directly, you know; and I shall tell Fred to suppress all about the dentist to-morrow."

...

"It sounds very deceitful, doesn't it?" says poor Brenda.

"It is nothing when you are used to it," replies the married sister.

"And I am safe to be found out: I always am," says Brenda.

"Well, it is all grandmamma's own fault. On her head be it," says José, who seems to enjoy the situation far more than the other two. "Never be a bug-bear, Brenda; you see what awful mischief accrues from making oneself a bogey. Oh! I shall go out of my mind if this hateful pain continues much longer. Go away, *do*. And come and see me to-morrow, and tell me all about it."

The Opera is charming, and Patti excels herself; but time flies, and bright things fade, and soon the curtain drops, and Spanish castles fall; and Brenda, with a sigh, places her hand upon her cousin's arm, and soon they have made their way through the fashionable throng, and are speeding homewards through the deserted streets.

As they arrive at number seven, some clock in the distance chimes twelve. They run up the steps, and Brenda puts her hand in her pocket to draw out the latch-key.

"Be sure you don't commit yourself about José's defection," says Wilding; and then he stops short, struck by the change in her face.

"George, did I give you the key?" she asks, in a frightened tone.

"No. It was on the sideboard when we came out. I told you to remember it. Have you not got it?"

"I have not. I never brought it at all. I *must* have given it to you," desperately.

"I am sure you did not."

"Nevertheless try. Try your pockets. Try every pocket you *have*," says Brenda miserably.

He does try every pocket, one after the other, but in vain, no key betrays itself anywhere.

"Well, never mind," says George, "we must only put a good face on the matter, and ring up the servants."

"*Ring!* You might ring until morning! You might ring until you were black in the face!" exclaims Brenda, with the impatience of despair, "and nobody could hear you. Why, they all sleep at the very top of the house, beyond all hearing; and grandmamma never will get a bell put to their rooms. What *is* to be done?"

"Come to José."

"José has no servants' bell either, and they all go to bed early," replies Miss Molyneux on the verge of tears.

"Good gracious!" says Mr. Wilding, at last thoroughly roused to a sense of the awfulness of the situation; "what on earth shall we do?"

It is a dark and gloomy night. The "Chaste

diana" has sulked and gone to bed; the stars are nowhere. Not a sound disturbs the silence that envelops the quiet road, except an occasional cough from Fenmore, the coachman, who is waiting with the brougham to convey Wilding home, and who sits upon the box as the very model of propriety, and never so much as glances in their direction. Perhaps he is wrapt in fond dreams of days gone by when he and Mrs. Fenmore were "a-courting," and has a secret sympathy for the two on the doorstep.

"This all comes of doing what I knew was wrong," says Brenda presently, finding her companion silent. "I wish," ungratefully, "you had never asked me to go to that horrible Opera."

"I thought she sang very well," alluding to Patti. "And I certainly couldn't be expected to know how things were going to turn out," says Mr. Wilding, somewhat aggrieved.

"You shouldn't have listened to José; you should have brought me straight home. It is all your fault," says Brenda, most unfairly.

"Well, it wasn't I forgot the latch-key, anyhow," says Mr. Wilding, unwisely incensed.

At this unlucky speech, his cousin, seeing at last a good opening, gives way to bitter reproach.

"Yes, that is just like you," she says, large tears gathering in her lovely eyes. "To upbraid me now, when I am most unhappy. If *you* were in trouble, George, I would not treat you so."

"Don't speak to me like that," says Wilding miserably. "I am far more upset about this unfortunate matter than you can be."

"That is impossible. Grandmamma can't look at *you*, as though she meant to devour you in one bite."

"If I had anywhere to take you," goes on George, "any home of my own, with some old aunt at the head of it, for instance. Lots of fellows have aunts who live with them," grudgingly. "But I never saw the aunt that would live with *me*; and, of course, a bachelor's rooms wouldn't do, not if I paced the streets all night. Why on earth am I not married?" says Mr. Wilding distractedly.

"Is this a time to talk nonsense?" asks Brenda, with a sudden vehemence. "Of course, if you were married, I should not be here at all, and that would end the whole matter."

She is looking up at him from under the bewitching hood, with two angry eyes, that say far more than their owner is aware of. Her lips are quivering; two crimson spots enrich each rounded cheek. Wilding, gazing at her extreme beauty, loses his head.

"I am not sure of that," he says unsteadily. "I think if I were married, you, and you only, would be standing just there."

"George! George! have you forgotten?" entreats she, shrinking from him.

"I have forgotten nothing, not even Disney," returns he recklessly. "I know you don't care for that ghastly

ld corpse, laid out by Poole; how could you? And I  
ove you, darling—*darling*. Forgive me, Brenda; I  
ould not speak to you like this now, and here, but  
has been on my heart for so long, and—I can't help  
But, if you will give me even the faintest encourage-  
ment, you shall never marry Disney, I swear."

Perhaps he might have said even more, but Miss  
Molyneux has burst into tears, and has covered her face  
with her hands, and is sobbing quietly but bitterly.

"Don't do that, Brenda," exclaims he passionately.  
I can stand anything but that. Look here," desperately,  
something must be done, you know; you can't stay  
here all night. Wait one moment."

Running down the steps he touches the devoted  
Denmore's elbow, and says something to him in a low  
one. An earnest conversation follows. Then comes a  
faint sound as of silver falling upon silver, and then  
Wilding returns to his cousin's side.

"Come," he says quietly, taking her hand. "I have  
arranged for you. There is no help for it, Brenda; you  
must do as I tell you."

Brenda, still crying silently, suffers herself to be  
led to the carriage, and together they enter it again, and  
drive away.

At luncheon, next day, Brenda is singularly silent.  
Lady Molyneux has fortunately asked few questions  
about last night's proceedings, and Lord Disney—who



is with them—disdains to seek information about anything in which Wilding has had a part. Theodore, Brenda's brother, is also present.

Grandmamma's indifference is all that can be desired; Disney's sullen silence equally happy; and, in fact, all is going merry as a marriage-bell, until Theodore, unconsciously, but fatally, lets fall a bombshell that blows the blessed calm to atoms.

"I say, Brenda, it was well you forgot your latch-key last night," says this misguided youth, with the utmost *bonhomie*. "I found it on the sideboard after you had left; and but for it could not have let myself in, as I have lost my own."

His sister turns very white.

"Brenda's—*my* latch-key, you mean," says grandmamma quickly. "But you dream, Theodore; Brenda had it with her at the Opera; she herself could not have got in without it."

Brenda casts an anguished glance at Theodore, who is—and, what is worse, looks—distinctly puzzled.

"Explain, Brenda. You surely had it," says grandmamma, in a voice that admits of no evasion.

Disney, laying down his knife and fork, gazes with half-closed eyes at the embarrassed girl.

"Had what, grandmamma?" asks she faintly, to gain time.

"What? The latch-key. Are you deaf?" says grandmamma.

Brenda is silent. Lies are at any time abhorrent

her, and now to tell one will be useless, as her hesitation has been marked.

"Brenda, speak!" says grandmamma, in an awful tone. "You had it with you?"

"Of course she had! What a fuss about nothing. I must have been my own I found," breaks in Theodore, lying valiantly, but vainly.

"I had not, grandmamma," says Brenda bravely, but in accents hardly intelligible.

"Then pray how did you come in last night?"

"I did not come in at all," replies Brenda, in agony. "Grandmamma, listen; let me explain—"

But grandmamma is quite past explanation. She has risen, and is standing with both her old withered hands pressed upon the table, as though to support her under this crowning horror, and is glaring at the terrified child with fierce dark eyes.

"Am I to understand," she says, "that you spent last night out of my house?"

"If you would let me speak," says Brenda, sobbing.

"Answer me, wretched girl. Were you with your sister?"

"No. She—"

"Not here, nor with your sister, but with George Wilding, I presume. Hah! Not another word! I always knew what would come of your intimacy with that degraded young man."

"This is all shocking—shocking," says Lord Disney, in his slow, aggravating manner. "And, er"—brilliantly

—"shocking! Of course, Miss Molyneux, this, young man—your cousin—having found more favour in your sight than I have been fortunate enough to find, I beg to resign my present position, and withdraw from an engagement that no doubt is irksome to you. You will pardon me, Lady Molyneux, if I say this is all very sad, *very* sad," with an elaborate bow.

"Sad—it is disgraceful! Go, girl, to your room, and stay there until I decide on what shall be done with you. My roof shall no longer cover one so lost to all sense of—"

Theodore, rising abruptly, goes to his sister's side and passes his arm round her.

"Look here, grandmamma, stop all that," he says, with a frown; "it might do at the 'Duke's,' but it's out of place here, and I won't have Brenda abused."

Here some one, with a grateful smile, removes his arm from Brenda's waist, and places his own there instead. It is George Wilding, who has entered unannounced; just a minute or two before a small, plain woman, who appears, and stands unnoticed in the doorway, with a pretty swansdown cloak and hood upon her arm, that contrasts oddly with her own meaner garments.

"Who is abusing Brenda?" demands George Wilding, looking quietly upon the assembled group, yet with a curious light in his eyes that marks him dangerous in his present mood. "Who is casting even the faintest slur upon her? He shall answer to me for it,"

He stares coldly, and somewhat insolently, at Lord Disney as he speaks, and that discreet nobleman, dropping his eyeglass, discovers a difficulty in finding it again.

"I've made some beastly mistake, you know. It is all my fault," says Theodore, with extreme contrition.

Here the plain little woman in the doorway, perceiving a lull in the conversation, comes timidly forward.

"Please, Miss Molyneux, I have brought you your opera cloak," she says, "as I feared you might be wanting it again to-night."

"Oh, thank you," says Wilding, turning to her promptly. "Perhaps, Mrs. Fenmore, as you are here, you will kindly tell Lady Molyneux of all your goodness to Miss Brenda last night,—how you took her in, and made her very comfortable in your own house, when—because of the stupidity of the arrangements in *this* house—she found herself out in the cold; and how you, yourself, brought her safely back here this morning."

"Oh! I'm sure, my lady," says the coachman's wife, dropping a courtesy, "I'm only sorry I couldn't do more for Miss Molyneux. I doubt she was desperate uncomfortable, my lady; but I did my best."

"What is all this?" says grandmamma. "I fail to understand; and riddles are an abomination to me."

"When we found it impossible to ring up your servants, and knew the latch-key had been forgotten, I

took Brenda to Mrs. Fenmore's house, where, if not exactly in a Belgravian mansion, she was at least as safe as in the home of a duchess," with a kind bow to Mrs. Fenmore. "Don't cry, Brenda, tears are too sacred to be wasted on such a miserable occasion as the present."

"Did Miss Molyneux sleep in your house last night?" asks Lady Molyneux, addressing the coachman's wife, and insolently giving Wilding to understand she refuses to credit his story unsupported.

"Yes, my lady; she came to me a little after twelve o'clock, and proud I was, my lady, to be of the least service to her. I brought her back myself this morning, which I hope, Miss—" respectfully to Brenda—"you didn't catch cold, and are none the worst for your strange bed; which Fenmore do say that change of sheets at any time is most dangerous."

"I am quite well, and I thank you very much, Mrs. Fenmore," says Brenda, in a stifled tone. As her face is pressed against George's grey coat, this is hardly cause for wonder.

"As for you, sir," says Wilding, turning to the discomfited lord, "having heard you with my own ears decline the honour of an alliance with this young lady, I beg to tell you it was just as well you did so—it saves trouble, as she had not the smallest intention of marrying you."

"*Sir!*" exclaims the aristocratic fossil, taking fire at this insult.

"No, sir, not the smallest," repeats Wilding contemptuously; "she has the good—I mean, of course, the bad—taste to prefer me, which, after all, when one comes to think of it, is only natural. What bond *could* there be between May and December?"

"Brenda—" begins grandmamma, with much wrath.

"Go and put on your things, Brenda," interrupts George sternly. "I shall take you to your sister. Go, my love," in a fond whisper to the trembling girl, who at the word escapes gladly from the room. "You, madam, have behaved infamously to her," goes on George, determined to carry things with a high hand. "And when you said she should never sleep another night beneath your roof, you spoke the truth. José will receive her, and she shall stay with her until I marry her. I will not have her heart broken. If you wish to apologise to her for this morning's conduct, you can see her at Cromwell Road."

Having made this galling suggestion, he has the good sense to beat an instant retreat.

"I must say I think you deserve every bit of it," says Theodore to his stricken grandame. "You have acted towards Brenda for the last two years like a regular old Tartar, and here's the end of it."

"Leave the room, you wicked boy!" commands grandmamma, in a shrill tone; and Theodore for once obliges her, more, I think, because he wishes to go than from any high sense of duty.

"And I have always borne with that boy, and

humoured him in every respect," says Lady Molyneux, mopping her eyes indignantly. "To say *I* deserved such treatment—*I!*—"

"I can't help saying I agree with Theodore," says Lord Disney solemnly, with aggravating slowness.

"*Eh?*" says grandmamma, instantly putting down the handkerchief, and turning to face the enemy with renewed vigour, as she scents hostility in a fresh and unexpected quarter.

"Yes, yes! You have acted abominably," goes on Disney, who is evidently not afraid of an old woman. "You have accused that charming young lady, your granddaughter, of an indiscretion she would scorn to commit. You have jumped at conclusions, and it's—it's—it's execrable form, madam, to jump at conclusions!"

"'Form!'" says grandmamma witheringly; "what is it you mean by that? Is it the 'human form divine' you are mumbling about? or is it slang you are using? If so, I think it most unbecoming in any one of *our* age, to ape the vile manners of the present day."

This is a cruel shaft; and the elderly beau, in spite of Poole and Hoby and Rimmel, winces perceptibly.

"You should have investigated matters before going too far," says he, somewhat depressed.

"So should you," retorts she; "you were in a vast hurry, methinks, to relinquish your bride."

"I blame you for it all," returns he fiercely.

"Tut, man! Don't think *I* care for either your name or censure," says this indomitable old dame, regarding him scornfully. "George Wilding will marry me now, and that puts a finish to it. And I'm not sorry I'm not glad of it. Demanding your pardon, Disney, I begin to think he is the better man of the two!"

"Your opinion, madam, is of course indisputable," says she with a low bow. "But yet I flatter myself your granddaughter was willing enough to become Lady Disney, till you—"

"Did you ever hear of young Lochinvar?" asks the old woman, with a maddening cackle; "it reminds me somewhat of your case. And what was that George Wilding said about 'May and December?' Ha—ha—good, *very* good!"

"You are an odious old woman!" says my lord, losing all patience.

"Eh?—where's your vaunted manners, Disney? Your courtly bow—your incomparable smile? I will compel you to leave this room, this instant," says she, striking her gold-headed cane upon the floor with considerable force.

"I obey you, madam, willingly—and now take my leave of it, and of the house, and of you too, I hope, *for ever*," returns he furiously; and, striding up the room and through the hall, passes beyond the portals numbered seven—never to return!

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# FORTUNE'S WHEEL.



## FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

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"I DON'T know," returns the girl dreamily, answering some question: but her mind has evidently wandered from it, and is lost in sad labyrinths of its own creation. She is sitting amidst the scented clover—a great grove of pine trees making a fragrant background—and has taken her knees into her embrace. Her large earnest eyes are full of an intensity almost terrible in one so young and fragile, and are fixed upon the break in the view through which the ocean can be seen, 'as it lies moaning far down below.

In her lap a heap of dying roses are emitting the sweetest perfume. Half-forgotten they are lying there, though plucked an hour ago to adorn the quaint old Wedgwood jars in the drawing-room.

"That I love you?" says the young man who is stretched at her feet upon the grass, gazing into her preoccupied face with a curious intentness. Evidently his prolonged stare distresses her; she flushes delicately, and turns her head away.

"Let us talk of something else," she says, with a poor attempt at lightness.

"Afterwards, if you will. But first I must get to the root of your mysterious speech," returns he, shifting his position so as to bring his eyes to bear again upon her averted face. "You have almost told me that you don't believe in my love for you."

"Not quite that."

"Yes, *quite* that, as it seems to me. I want you to tell me why."

"How *can* I? Even to myself an explanation would be difficult; and to *you*—"

She hesitates; her head is bent now; her slender fingers are toying nervously with the roses in her lap; the pale flush of a moment since has deepened into a burning crimson. Still pitilessly he keeps his eyes upon her face, as though her childish confusion and distress affords him some inward amusement. With a persistence that amounts to cruelty he watches each variation of her mobile features, finding, in thus studying her transparent mind, a selfish pleasure not to be foregone.

"Go on," he says evenly. To *me*—"

"Why will you pursue the subject?" she asks tremulously, raising her large eyes to his for a moment.

"Because I wish it," returns he, still smiling.

Under the smile, however, there is a touch of mastery beneath which she moves uneasily.

"If you will have it, then," she says, "it is this: there are moments when I *think* you love me; there are moments when I seem to *know* it—but there are many moments when I doubt your power to be faithful."

He throws himself back on the grass, and laughs loud. Perhaps he has not seen the agony on her young face, or the wistful longing to be contradicted in her beautiful eyes.

"What a baby you are, Vera! And so you think, with a little wisdom bred in your pretty head in this old-fashioned grange—or borrowed from the village down below—you can read *me* through and through, and sift my character with ease. Well! think so still."

"Such thought is torture," returns she, in a low voice, desolated by a touch of tenderest passion. "Tell me rather that my doubt is false."

"A taste of punishment will do you good," retorts he, smiling still, and pinching her little shell of an ear in a gay fashion. "Tut! let us now speak of that something else' you were so eager for a while ago."

A sudden, curious flash lights her eyes—her nostrils dilate. It is but a momentary thing, and then is gone.

"Well, what shall it be about?" she says calmly.

"You, of course; what other subject do I care for?" says Stainer quickly. Perhaps he has seen that sudden flash.

"You don't ask me what *I* care for?" says the girl slowly, her manner still a little strange.

"Because—was I wrong?—I believed I would be your first thought as you are mine! And, surely, you should take precedence in our discussion."

Her new-born anger dies. A heavenly expression comes to her soft face as she turns it upon him.

"To think you must leave me this very evening!" she says, with tears in her eyes.

"Only for a little time."

"You are glad to go back to your London?"—with a side glance at him full of suppressed reproach.

"I can be glad of nothing that takes me away from you." There is real feeling in his handsome face as he says this. "You know that, at least, Vera?"

For answer, she holds out one hand to him, which he kisses lovingly; and, still holding it, drags himself even nearer to her over the swaying grass.

"Still you love the town," she says jealously.

"Well—I *like* it."

"Yet when your uncle, over there," pointing vaguely in the direction of some wooded lands on her left, "dies, you will have to live down here most of your life."

"I shall have *you* then!" says Stainer.

"Ah! yes. But if you *prefer* the town.—What a pity it is I could not go there with you."

"It wouldn't suit you," says Major Stainer slowly. "You are only a little violet—the more charming to *me*"—hastily—"for that; but you would, I fear, feel yourself lost in that big, world you speak of."

"Not lost, with *you*," says Vera uncertainly. Somehow her great eyes, resting on him as they do with oft question and wonder in their depths, put him out of himself, man of the world though he be.

"Of course, not in that sense," he says. "But you have no idea how different you are from the women we meet up there."

"Are they so very lovely?" asks the girl, in a low, disheartened tone.

"Not so lovely by half as *you*, most of them, if one goes into it. But it isn't only eyes and mouth and a flawless complexion that carries the day. There is an air about those others that a little country mouse like you, however highly bred, could not acquire for years."

"I cannot see how even the *Queen* can be more than a lady," says the child, with pretty dignity, "and surely a *Wriothesly* may lay claim to that old title."

"Birth and breeding have nothing to do with it," says Stainer, with a touch of weariness. She is too ignorant of the world's ways to understand him. He is unaware that he himself is too ignorant of heaven's ways to understand the sweet soul within *her*. "With these women I speak of, who have spent their days in a whirl of excitement ever since their schoolroom doors closed upon them, you would be misunderstood. You would find yourself miles behind them in earthly lore."

"Could I not learn it?" leaning forward eagerly.

"Better not try. No. The material for that sort



of thing was not born with you. You are a trifle too earnest for fashionable life. These others I speak of wouldn't like it in you."

"Not even those æsthetic people, of whom you sometimes tell me? Might not this crime of mine, this earnestness you condemn, be deepened into intensity? If I proved myself 'intense' they should claim me as a sister. Should they not?"

"There would be a trifling objection," says Stainer, laughing again. "*Their* earnestness is all sham, yours a startling reality. Once they found that out they would never forgive you."

"So you think I shall never make a great 'ladye,'" says she, with a smile that is thoughtful.

"Never."

"Yet I should like to try. I would that some fairy sent me a fortune, and a face so fair that all the world should bow to it; then we should see."

He shakes his head.

"The strain would be too heavy for you. You are too simple a child to make a sensation in society. Give up all such ambitious views, and wish for something else."

"Then I shall wish for your return, every minute in the day, until we meet again," she says prettily.

"By Jove! that reminds me," exclaims he, springing to his feet, "I must go at once, unless I wish to miss my train, and I am due at Lady Bland's to-night. Good-bye, my darling, and believe I shall never forget

you—*never*, and that the last month, spent in this sweet Devonshire of yours, has been the happiest of my life."

"You did not ask me to remember *you*," says the girl, standing back from him. She is clad in a soft, white, clinging gown, and her hands are clasped loosely before her. Great heavy drops of woe stand trembling in her lustrous sapphire eyes. Her whole attitude is suggestive of bitterest grief and disappointment. She would willingly have gone to him, and clung round his neck, and wept her heart out upon his; but, half-unconsciously, he has taught her that expressed emotion of any kind is in bad taste. "Though indeed there was no need to ask," she adds, with a touch of solemnity in her young voice; "I shall never forget."

"Oh, *that!* I *know* that," he says, with careless, comfortable trust in her affection. And then he takes her in his arms, and at the very last she so far forgets her lesson, as to give Nature way, and clings to him, and lets him kiss her at his will. And then it is all over; and he goes up to town, finding solace (even as he thinks of her) in a cigar; whilst she spoils her lovely eyes in weeping for him all that live-long night.

He wrote her fifteen letters in all, including one from Calais, where he stopped on his way to Berlin (as military attaché), and then he came to the conclusion that he must marry for money if he meant to keep up the old place as it should be kept—a matter that for

many weeks had been troubling him; and then he told himself he was a heartless fellow; and then—he forgot her!

Patti is singing, and deathly silence reigns, save for the grand tones that swell, and fade, and rise again, filling the wide expanse of the vast theatre with a rapturous melody. Through the great hush the music is sobbing—thrilling—holding, as in a spell, the hearts of the mighty concourse. Who shall say what forgotten memories are brought into vivid life by these charming sounds? What sad but exquisite recollections make the pulses beat? At least they bring tears into the eyes of *one*.

She is quite a young girl: and in her absorption is leaning rather more over the cushions of her box than she is aware. Her whole soul is in her face, which is extremely beautiful.

“Sit back a *little*, dearest; you should think *sometimes*,” says a pretty woman, half a dozen years her senior, and evidently her chaperon, tapping her furtively with her fan. “You know how people watch your every movement, and they will not believe—”

“What does it matter? Let her be happy in her own way,” says a young man hurriedly, to the pretty woman, stopping a second message from the fan.

Indeed the girl has been so engrossed with Patti, that the first warning has gone unheeded. Her eyes are full of passionate delight, tintured with sadness—

who is ever "merry when he hears sweet music?"—her lips are slightly parted. Her gown is of costly white silk, brodered with pearls, and she is older, raver, yet altogether strangely unaltered since that time, a year ago, when she sat amidst the fragrant lover and watched the roses dying, and listened, with ar-off, dreamy gaze, to the plaintive murmuring of the waves as they beat their foamy breasts against the cruel rocks far down below.

Then her "false love" sat beside her: now— Her eyes grow dim. Slowly, as though some inward force compels her, she turns them from the stage, and looks into the stalls below. There she sees him!

"Vera!" The voice comes to her, vaguely, instinctively, as it were through a hazy mist. It is her cousin Lady Vynor's voice, and it awakes her to the necessity for calm. She is still leaning on the cushions of the box, but now she draws herself up, and leans back, until she is so hidden by the curtains on her side that she is no longer visible to the stalls beneath. Raising her hand she passes it hurriedly across her forehead.

"She is ill," says Lord Digby hastily. He is the young man who had taken her part a moment since.

"Ah! so she is," says Lady Vynor, in a frightened way. "Vera, dearest—"

"It is only the heat," says the girl, compelling herself to speak by a passionate effort. "It is really nothing." She leans back again as if exhausted.

"What *is* to be done?" says Lady Vynor helplessly, half rising from her seat. She is a nervous woman, always on the lookout for midnight conflagrations and sudden deaths.

"Nothing," says Digby quickly. "The opera is nearly over. Give her time to recover herself a little, and then take her home. The heat is intense; it is no wonder she feels it."

Indeed Vera is ashen grey, but has by this time regained a certain amount of composure, and *with* it the knowledge that the old love upon which she had set such store is—*dead*: buried, lost, gone past all recall, in that one brief moment when her eyes had rested upon Stainer's.

Digby, taking a scent bottle from Lady Vynor, presses it into Vera's hand without looking at her. The delicacy, the tenderness of the action falls warmly on the girl's bruised heart. How good he has been to her!—how sincerely he has loved her and obeyed her slightest behest for two long months, without reward or any hope of it!

Twice Vera had refused him; and twice he had taken her refusal very well, but with an evident determination to persevere in his suit. Being an Englishman, he had declined to recognise defeat. And now, indeed, in this hour, does he find his constancy crowned with success. The generosity and spirit, the gentleness that marks him for its own, becomes fully known to her as she withdraws her eyes from that un-

expected recognition in the stalls. She turns with a shudder of repugnance from the dark beauty of the false face there, and glancing at Digby, tells herself there is surely beauty greater than the merely physical; so thinking, she says some little kind thing to him that lifts his heart from Hades to Olympus.

To explain to you about Stainer. When his eyes had fully met hers, and he is satisfied that the radiant young beauty, up above, is in very truth the simple child whose love he had played with for awhile and then flung carelessly aside, he turns to the man next him.

"*Who* is that girl in white in the box up there?" he says hoarsely.

"My dear fellow! Not know the reigning beauty of the hour!" says his friend. "That is Miss Wriothesly, the most exquisite creature in England, recognised as such."

"I have been abroad," stammers Stainer, with a poor attempt at indifference. The scent of dying roses, the roar of a far-off ocean is in his ears.

"Ah! just so," says his friend pityingly. "Greatest mistake in the world to go one foot out of town. They say travelling enlarges the mind. It narrows it, to my thinking. The sweet shady side of Pall Mall, and the Row, will teach you all that ever you may want to know—and a good deal more."

"Tell me of Miss Wriothesly," interrupts Stainer impatiently.

"Don't you see my theory exemplified straight through? If you had stayed at home like a sensible man you would not have had to ask the question. A year ago she was unknown. Then fortune found her. Some forgotten relation in Canada died and left her sole heiress to his enormous wealth; whereupon other relatives suddenly discovered they had for years been pining for her society. Her cousin, Lady Vynor (pretty woman in the box with her), swooped down to the country grange where the girl was buried alive, and, bringing her up to town, flung her upon the world of fashion. A *beautiful* heiress is a rarity. Need I say how magnificent was her success?"

"And the man with her?" asks Stainer, with dry lips that almost refuse to speak for him. Vera has now withdrawn from the front of the box, and a wild desire to rise and go to her, to see her again face to face, to hear her voice, is maddening him.

"That is Lord Digby. Good catch, too, and terribly *épris* in that quarter. Dare say she'll marry him after all, though she has refused him, off and on, it's whispered, ever since their first meeting. They say her maid brings her a bouquet and a fresh offer from him every morning."

"She *has* refused him, then?" says Stainer, a fierce glow of hope springing up within his breast. The one glimpse caught of her a moment since has waked in him a second love, before which the first seems cold and tame. Can this radiant beauty, with the pure,

proud face, be indeed the little fond girl who had told him of her longing to be a great "ladye," and whose aspirations he had so mockingly crushed?

"Yes. But time works wonders, and most women go down before a title. Perhaps, with her beauty, she aims at higher game: but I should think an earldom ought to count. Oh, yes, I've no doubt she'll marry him in the long run."

"*Why?*" demanded Stainer, so savagely that his companion pauses to stare at him in simple wonderment through his eyeglass.

"Why shouldn't she," he replies at last. "He is all any one's fancy could possibly want to paint, and he is her slave into the bargain. She must be the most ungrateful woman born if she doesn't show grace to him in the end. His love for her has been earnest and faithful!"

At this last word Stainer winces. How can *he*, whose love has been so *unfaithful*, hope for forgiveness? There had indeed been moments during the past few months when he had suffered his mind to wander to her, and he had thought of her with regret and longing. During these brief intervals he had pictured her to himself as living always with her grandfather in that old-world village, alone, companionless; dreaming, perchance, sadly of him, "poor little thing!" He grows hot and shame-stricken, as memory brings back to him these vain imaginings.

And now the curtain falls. It is all over; and ris-



ing hastily, with a scanty word of adieu to his friend, he makes for the large hall, where he will see her as she passes to her carriage.

Presently she comes, enveloped in soft cashmeres, white as her own perfect skin, and with her two companions. Lady Vynor stops to speak to some chance acquaintance, and Vera is left virtually alone with Lord Digby. Her hand is resting on his arm; under the pretence of drawing the cashmere even more closely round her, he lays his own upon it.

"I have been silent for a long time at your command, but I feel I *must* speak to-night," he whispers hurriedly. "Am I to take my final 'No' *now*?"

He has turned very pale.

"No," says the girl quickly. Then the absurdity of her answer striking her, a faint smile creeps into her eyes. "That is, she stammers, "it is no 'no,' I mean, only—"

"No 'no'? why that is 'yes' in any decent English!" he exclaims eagerly.

"Well, take it," she says, in a low tone, and with a glance that is half shy, half tender. "But," with nervous haste, "there is first something I must tell you. To-morrow, if you will come to me at four o'clock, I—"

At this moment a tall man, dark and handsome, pushing his way, somewhat cavalierly, through the groups, makes for where she is standing. His face is agitated, his eyes are alight. He holds out to her a hand that positively trembles, and after a hesitation, so

faint as to be almost imperceptible, Vera lays hers within it.

Yet the hesitation to a lover's eyes has been visible; to Digby it is now quite clear what it is she has got to tell him on the morrow.

"Come, Vera," says Lady Vynor, rustling up to her. Vera makes a movement as if to go to her, but Stainer holds her hand fast.

"I *must* see you; I must explain," he says, with white lips. "Give me time; place—"

"To-morrow," says Vera, very gently. She is almost tender with him. So softly her glance rests upon him, that Digby's faithful heart loses courage, and he forbids himself to dwell upon the hope that a few minutes since had made his pulses throb with only half-concealed delight.

"Park Lane," Vera is murmuring, in a low voice. She is still somewhat lost in wonder at this change that has come over her. Only yesterday she had believed in her love for this man, who now, holding her hand in a close clasp, and looking into her eyes with an impassioned gaze, fails to wake in her the poorest spark of feeling. "Come to-morrow, at three," she says—a suspicion of pity in her lingering glance.

. . . . .

At three o'clock the next day Major Stainer puts in an appearance in the charming drawing-room in Park Lane that calls Lady Vynor mistress. He finds there

awaiting him not only Vera Wriothesly, but the former pretty little lady likewise.

To her cousin, on her return from the opera last night, Vera had confided all her story—concealing nothing—and confessing to feeling a disagreeable amount of nervousness about the interview impending between her and her former lover.

“Go to bed, and don’t let *that* trouble you,” said Lady Vynor. “I have not come to my age, I hope, without being able to outwit a man. There; leave all that to me.”

Now, seated in her favourite lounging chair, wreathed in smiles, Laura Vynor betrays fine determination to out-sit her visitor—with a smiling obtuseness to any desire for her departure, beyond all praise.

She is almost effusively amiable to Stainer—welcoming him as an old friend of Vera’s. And so he has been at Berlin for a whole year! How delightful! He can now tell her (what she has been all her life so longing to know) whether Kaiser Wilhelm is as popular as one has been led to believe. And so on.

Stainer, bending in sulky silence, answers all her questions somewhat at random. His eyes are fixed upon the perfect profile of the girl sitting half inside the lace curtains of the window, and his mind is wandering to days, now past and gone, when her love had been his own beyond all doubt. *Her* eyes never once seek the room, but are turned upon the busy world of carriages outside. One hand is lying idle in

her lap, the other is lazily furling and unfurling a huge black fan. The curtains so far conceal her, that Stainer cannot see her expression, and so is unable to judge whether she is or is not as anxious to be rid of her talkative cousin as he is.

The moments, stealing all too swiftly by, tell him it is drawing very near to four o'clock, and that *even* an "old friend" must not inflict himself upon anybody for more than an hour at a time.

He has consigned Lady Vynor to regions impolite, and has half risen to take his departure, when an interruption occurs that compels Lady Vynor, *bon gré, mal gré*, to leave him alone with Vera. The mission on which the servant summons her admits of no delay.

When he has closed the door behind her he goes quickly to where Vera has been sitting. She has come out from the curtains, however, and is now advancing towards him.

"At last I can speak to you alone," he says, with a passion in his voice she had never heard there in the old days. "What tortures I have been enduring ever since that moment, last night, when once again my eyes looked into yours! And you, Vera—you cannot have forgotten *all!*"

"I have forgotten nothing," says the girl gravely.

"Ah, it is not so easy to forget!" cries he triumphantly. "And you—you have a heart. You must still feel—"

She interrupts him by a slight but eloquent gesture,

"I am not heartless indeed," she says; "and I have felt—*too much!*" There is a quiver in her sweet voice that misleads him. In truth, the emotion it expresses is not for him, but for the memory of those past dark hours when she had mourned so truly for a love, now known to be worthless.

"All may still be well with us!" exclaims he eagerly. "I love you now as I never loved you then. My silence during this past year I can explain. I—"

"*Can* you?" says Vera, not severely, but with a steady glance from her great violet eyes.

"I can—I will," declares he wildly. "I was mad then—blind. But surely the love you once bore me will help you to forgiveness?"

"The love you killed? Do you appeal to *that?*"

"I swear—"

"Nay, no more false oaths," interrupts she again, with a weary movement. "They will be useless now. The love you speak of is dead, slain by your own hand: if indeed," dreamily, "it ever existed."

"Not *dead*," entreats he, with extreme agitation. "Do not say that. Give me a fresh trial—one last chance—"

"Too late!" returns she, in a low but firm voice. Outside she can hear a step upon the stairs that of late has grown very familiar to her. The colour rushes back to her pale face, as she turns towards the door. It is flung open rather impetuously, and Digby enters the room.

Their eyes meet; but, seeing her standing close to Stainer in apparently agitated converse, Digby comes to a standstill, and looks at her with a terrible reproach in his beautiful eyes. This look fades, however, and gives place to one of ecstasy, as she goes quickly up to him, and frankly holds out to him both her hands.

Leaving them still in his warm clasp, she glances back to where Stainer is standing, as if rooted to the ground.

"Major Stainer," she says, with an odd little thrill in her soft voice, "let me introduce you to—to my future husband, Lord Digby!"

Training enables Stainer to acknowledge the rather distant bow made him by Digby, but the sense of utter defeat is crushing him. He has grown haggard and aged in these last few minutes. He mutters something about an engagement, seizes his hat, and bows himself out, without permitting himself to look into her face, even once again.

"Vera, you *meant* it?" says Digby, when they are alone. He is scarcely less agitated than the man who has just left the room.

"I did," returns she tremulously. "It is but a poor gift, but if you want me, I give myself to you gladly."

"With this gift that *you* call poor, what man on earth shall be so rich, so blest as I?"

"Better hear me first," whispers she. "Do not take me until I have told you all. Last night," in faltering accents, "I met—"

"Not another word," says Digby gently, "I know everything. That man who has just gone—you—you—"

"I was engaged to him," says Vera simply, though with very troubled eyes. "And he went away and forgot me. I—I thought I loved him then; but last night, when I saw him again—"

She breaks down here, and bursts into tears. Digby, taking her into his arms, presses her head tenderly against his breast.

"Don't cry, sweetheart," he says, with passionate fondness. "If you tell me you have discovered that your love for—for *him*—is still alive, I"—bravely—"shall try to bear it."

"Oh, no! not *that!*" exclaims she, shuddering slightly. "I felt then nothing but wonder that I should ever have known even a childish affection for him. I knew that old silly story was at an end for ever; and"—shyly—"I knew something else too."

"What, Vera?"

She can feel the tender arms around her tremble. Leaning back from him she looks softly into his eyes.

"That I loved *you!*" she says, pressing her pretty, flushed cheek against his.

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"AS IT FELL UPON A DAY."





## “AS IT FELL UPON A DAY.”

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It is mid-July, and oppressively warm. There was a thunder-storm yesterday, and another this morning. The season is drawing to a close, the Park grows empty. Everybody one meets declares “there is positively nobody in town;” and though one looks around, and notes the pushing crowds, and wonders why they say so, still one understands in a vague fashion what they mean, and begins to puzzle oneself over the strange dearth of carriages. Yet in truth town is not quite so deserted as it seems; the end of the season, to work-day people, is not so suggestive of the Engadine as it is to more fortunate mortals; and so London can still boast its unmoneyed thousands.

Into the National Gallery on this particular afternoon the hot sun is rushing with a vigour rarely known out of the fresh sweet country. It is dancing merrily over the quaint pictures, the bare rooms, the few artists, and the fewer visitors who are lounging from wall to wall; it is flooding with special brilliancy one room

which is the most deserted of all. There is indeed nothing very attractive in it, save a young girl and an old Giorgione.

But such a girl! She looks pale and a little worried; but there is the light of genius in her eyes as she looks from her easel to the Giorgione.

Presently she and her picture cease to be alone. Some one has entered the room, but so slowly, so noiselessly, that she is unaware of it—a young man with a reprehensibly listless air and a disappointed curve about his lips. He has been languidly sauntering amongst the woes of the "patient Griselda," and wondering much at the fashions and customs of those other days; but now, as he too gets enveloped in the blaze of sunlight that warms the Giorgione, his listless air and disappointed curve vanish, and a flash of satisfaction and glad relief takes their place.

The girl is working industriously at her task. Ever and again her glance seeks the masterpiece—a beautiful picture, no doubt, almost divine, but hardly as beautiful as the bronze-tinged head bending over the easel, and certainly not so alight with divinity as the warm earnest eyes in the pure childish face which every now and then glance at it, as if for inspiration.

She is poorly clad, but there is no unloveliness about her garments. Her bonnet is lying on the ground beside her. Her pearl-grey Quakerish gown, almost severe in its simplicity, is relieved at the throat and

wrists by soft ruffles of yellow lace—cheap lace, no doubt, but to the ignorant masculine eye quite as becoming as oldest point or Honiton.

The young man is apparently wrapped in admiration of the Giorgione, and, drawing nearer, gazes at it with an attention that speaks excellently well for his artistic tendencies; yet a sympathetic observer might well pity him for having taken up a bad position for the real enjoyment of the painting, as the bronzed little head is so placed just now that it lies exactly between him and it.

A steady gaze, it is said, makes itself felt. Be that as it may, the bronzed head turns presently a little impatiently in his direction, and the earnest eyes fix themselves upon him in a strange, absent yet reproachful fashion that puzzles him. To be puzzled is to be interested.

"I am in your light, perhaps?" he says humbly, feeling that he must speak to the owner of those wistful eyes or die.

"It isn't that," she answers quickly, as though heartily ashamed of her small discontent. "No, it was nothing." Her lips part, and she makes him a present of a lovely, friendly smile. "It was foolish of me; but just because I thought myself alone, and revelled in the thought, the fact of finding I was not altogether so, made me lose my grip upon my brush." She laughs softly, as though at her own folly.

"I shall go then. I am deeply grieved that my

stupid coming should have so disturbed you," says Sir Gerald, stepping back reluctantly.

"No, no—indeed you must not do that," entreats she earnestly. "Stay and see your pictures; I know you love them, because often of late I have noticed how frequently you come here, and with what real interest you study them."

For a moment Sir Gerald reads her face closely, and then tells himself he is a brute for his doubt.

"As for me, I am going," adds the girl, rising wearily. She stretches her arms impulsively, and then smiles again. "It is all very well," she says confidentially; "but one does get tired of it at times."

"Painting?" asks he.

"Yes—painting."

"Yet you have undoubted talent"—glancing at the copy.

"'A pretty touch,' as my old Jew says who buys my pictures from me," returns she lightly. "Let us not presume to go beyond his verdict. Good evening, sir."

She has tied on her bonnet by this time, and, gliding past him with a little kindly bow that still forbids further speech, is soon swallowed up by the nearest doorway.

An impatient exclamation falls from Sir Gerald's lips. Has he come here day after day and let himself in for the tail end of an insufferably dull season only for this? Is he never to know more of the owner of

those lambent eyes? Moodily he casts his own eyes to the floor, and there sees a tiny brush. Has she dropped it?

Snatching it up, he rushes in headlong fashion through the doorway by which she has disappeared, and so down the stone steps into Trafalgar Square. Fired with a sudden access of honesty, he looks wildly up and down the pavement for the owner of the recovered brush, but in vain!

The Fates however do not prove utterly unkind. Just when hope is gone, he spies in the far distance, moving at a rapid pace towards the Strand, a little figure clad in a Quakerish gown, and immediately, his heart once more beating high, starts in pursuit.

All down the Strand, down Fleet Street, farther still, he follows her into regions hitherto unknown. At last she comes to a standstill before a house, respectable, if somewhat grimy, and while Sir Gerald is wondering whether he shall approach her or not—brush in hand—she once more escapes from him through a yawning doorway.

Though baffled, he yet feels he has gained a point. At last he knows where she lives. Why not dawdle about these benighted parts for a little while—say, an hour or two—and then seek her with the avowed and perfectly respectable purpose of restoring to her her brush?

"Probably," thinks he, gazing sentimentally at it, "it is her favourite brush; no doubt she will welcome

me with open arms when she discovers I am the lucky finder of it!"

In spite of his many years in town and his proverbial successes with the prettier sex, he is now as honestly, as tenderly in love with this childish artist whose very name is unknown to him, as the spooniest schoolboy with his chum's sister.

Time, however, is always flying, and a young man, however far gone, begins, as the shades descend, to think about his dinner. With fear and trembling Sir Gerald approaches a neighbouring restaurant, and with a sinking heart demands a chop. His temerity is crowned with success. He finds that even in these savage regions they can grill the succulent chop as daintily as in Pall Mall.

With his faith in man restored, he leaves the pleasures of the table, and with renewed courage wanders once more towards No. 29. Gaining the house, he brings the paint-brush well into view, and knocks. He knocks three times, with decent intervals between each rat-tat, but nothing comes of it. When, however, he has arrived at the awful certainty that a tragedy has been enacted within, with a girl with earnest, speaking eyes for its victim, a maid-of-all-work opens the door about an inch or so, and asks him, with smothered indignation, what he wants. She is not genial, this girl, and has a smut on her nose and a black streak over her left eye, and is altogether more striking in appearance than strictly handsome.

Sir Gerald is deeply impressed by her. He is impressed too by the suddenly acquired knowledge that there is a difficulty about making a call on a young lady whose name is unknown to one. In desperation he glances at the little brush, and it supplies him with a ready wit. When he has smiled upon the smudgy maid within, and squeezed half a sovereign into her dusky palm, with effect, he says mildly,—

"The young lady who lives here, and who—who paints—you understand?—I wish to see her. I have a message for her. Will you be so good as to take her my card?"

"All right—you foller me," says the undainty lass, ignoring the card, and beckoning him towards the staircase.

Gladly, willingly, Sir Gerald repeats her footsteps one by one upon the creaking boards that lead him nigher heaven than he has ever yet been—in truth, the stairs seem interminable. Reaching at length the right landing, his conductor taps loudly on the panel of a door and cries with stentorian lung—

"A visitor to you, Miss Horrocks!" and immediately afterwards vanishes with a speed incredible down the murky staircase.

"Come in!" cries a voice blithe and joyful, and full of happy expectation.

Sir Gerald, pushing open the door, accedes to this hospitable request, and enters the room.

It is a poor room, indifferently furnished, yet very



pretty in its own small quaint fashion, and so—so like its mistress in many ways. The mistress herself, however, is hardly up to the mark just now as her eyes light on Sir Gerald. First the gladness dies from them, and then a surprise largely mingled with disappointment takes its place.

"Oh, dear," she says quickly, irrepressibly, "how you surprised me! I thought you were—" She stops short, and again regards him curiously, but no longer unkindly.

"I'm so sorry I'm not," says Sir Gerald, a little bitterly, though with pretended contrition. He is standing motionless in the doorway, feeling rather afraid to advance after this unpropitious reception. What may not her pause mean? Who was it she was expecting? For whom did she mistake him? An acknowledged lover, no doubt. Dire jealousy enters his soul, and deadens all other sensibilities.

He looks so dejected that his hostess at once recovers her self-possession.

"Pray come in," she says politely, if coldly. "Is there—what can I do for you?"

"I brought you your brush," he says, laying it on the table. "I was passing by, and thought you might perhaps be wanting it. Good evening." He moves towards the door.

"Oh, let me thank you before you go!" says the girl earnestly.

"Some other time. I beg your pardon for having

intruded at all, and now especially, when you are expecting friends."

"Not friends—one friend only. I haven't had me"—smiling softly—"to miss my brush yet; but I can see it is one of my best."

"One friend is always more attractive than many," says Sir Gerald, ignoring the brush question. He is indeed full of an absorbing desire to hear something more of the friend, though, when thinking of him, heaves out the 'r.'"

"My friend is certainly more attractive than many," responds she brightly. "But—I'm afraid now"—glancing sadly at a tiny clock in the corner—"it is growing so late to expect any one. I'm afraid I shall see none to-night."

"Too late at eight o'clock! Surely your friend will not be able to keep away!" says Sir Gerald, with a light sneer, meant for the recreant lover.

"She cannot always come, poor thing!" says the girl, divine pity in her eyes.

She—she! His whole face changes; his heart once more grows light. Whoever the blessed "she" may be, he feels an intense gratitude towards her!

Meantime the little gracious figure standing at the other side of the table is regarding him with growing intensity. Presently she breaks the silence.

"What could have brought you to this neighbourhood?" she asks slowly, as if still pondering irresolutely

some puzzling thought. "I hope—I do hope you did not come simply to restore me my brush."

"Well, yes, I did," says Sir Gerald humbly. He is well versed in society's lies, this young man, yet he finds it impossible to lie to this girl with her pure, beautiful face and innocent, earnest eyes that seem to read his very soul. Will she be angry with him for calling? Will she turn him out, and forbid him ever to look at her again?

Raising his head to meet his doom, he meets a charming, grateful face instead.

"How more than good of you!" she says. "So few people will take so much trouble about any one. But how did you find out my address?"

"I followed you," says Sir Gerald honestly. "I didn't like to give you the brush in the street, you know—that is—I—I wanted to call on you, but I was afraid you might not like it, and so—Look here, Miss Horrocks—as I know your name, I think it is only right you should know mine."

As he says this, he hands her his card. Having read it, she looks at him again.

"You had a long walk, I am afraid," she says sweetly, but not more sweetly than before—a fact he notes; then—"May I give you a cup of tea?" she says, a little shyly.

"You must not let me be a trouble to you," returns he, thinking how irresistible she is with the faint touch of nervousness about her.

“It will be no trouble. The fact is”—blushing warmly, and laughing—“I want my own tea now. See—it is ready, so you may as well have it with me—that is”—with sudden recollection—“if you don’t want to go anywhere else.”

“I don’t want to go anywhere else,” says Sir Gerald, which is the strict truth.

He wheels the little table more into the centre of the room for her, and begins to cut the bread and butter. Feeling all awkwardness at an end, he begins too an animated conversation that shows no sign of flagging, and so far affects her that she grows as eloquent as he does, and chatters to him gaily of her early years, before her spendthrift father was ruined and departed this life in anything but the odour of sanctity, leaving his one little girl to buffet the waves of fortune penniless and without protection. She tells him too about her pictures, her successes with them, the prices received for them, the grasping old Jew whom she plainly but erroneously regards as a tried and trusty friend. She pours out the tea, and asks him pleasantly if he takes sugar, during all these confidences, and is openly glad when he says, “Yes, lots!” and altogether they grow decidedly cosy and sympathetic. There is a pretty bunch of white sweet-scented pinks in an inexpensive bowl in the middle of their table, giving quite a festive air to the entertainment. Marking her tender appreciation of these homely flowers, Sir Gerald makes a

mental note that will ensure his attendance at his florist's on the morrow.

"And do you mean to tell me," he says presently, with earnest concern, "that your father left you with— with nothing but——"

"But what my fingers can earn?"

"Well, yes."

"Not altogether quite," she says, with a bright smile. "I have a little—not anything to signify, you know, but still a little."

"I have always so wanted to know what 'a little' means," says Sir Gerald, fixing his elbow on the table, and his chin on his palm, and his eyes on her.

The knowledge that there is indelicacy in his question does not deter him making it. To know how it is with her in all matters, great and small, is now the sworn object of his life.

"In my case," replies she simply, "it means twenty pounds a year."

"Ah!" he stoops suddenly and brushes some imaginary dust from his boots; then, with an effort—"I dare say it—"

"Oh, it is the greatest help to me!" interrupts she brightly, leaning across the table to him, her lips smiling. "I can never feel quite poor as long as I have that, you see."

"No—of course not."

"I have really—well, not everything I want, to be

sure," she goes on, with heavenly content, "but still many things that—that others, perhaps, have not. There's a poor girl, for instance, that I know—the friend I was expecting this evening— But I mustn't tease you, must I?"

"It doesn't tease me. Tell me of your friend."

"It is her spine, poor thing! She lives next door, and sometimes she creeps in to me; but it is all she can do. The only thing she has now to comfort her are her books; but she has so few of them. She had a cousin who used to lend her volumes from a library, but she died this year; and now there is no one, and she is too poor to subscribe herself. All she can do now is to lie on her sofa the livelong day and think over again the stories she has read. And she is so patient! Isn't it sad? I show her my pictures before they go to the Jew, and she makes little stories out of them for herself; but she misses her books."

Sir Gerald makes another mental note that will make him to Mudie's on the morrow. But his silence disturbs her.

"I have worried you," she says contritely, "with my one acquaintance and my many troubles; let us think now of something more interesting to you."

"I don't think we can," returns Sir Gerald.

"How quickly the days die, even now!" she says presently, without premeditated thought. But, when she has said it—as if some sudden displeasing certainty comes to her—a shadow crosses her beautiful face.

He is quick to see it.

"I have a little message I must deliver to my sister before the daylight fades," he says pleasantly, rising slowly. "Let me say, then, *au revoir*—not good-bye, as I trust we shall meet again—and soon."

It is very soon—and very often too. There is something haunting about her face which draws him to it day after day—into the galleries always, but to her own home with a delicate infrequency that betrays the tender carefulness of an honest lover. Flowers rare and fragrant make sweet her tiny room, and her sick friend is made happy by all the latest, best books the library can provide.

It is one of those rare, glad, coveted evenings when he feels he may go to see her in her own home. The sun is blazing hotly on road and pavement, the macadamised streets are melting miserably beneath its scorching glance. The dying touches of a sultry July are penetrating even into the shop-windows, and are causing the lilies and roses to droop and languish there as well as in the parks and public gardens. Though day is fading fast, Apollo still clings obstinately to his throne; the wonted cool of evening is but a myth, the approach of night is even hotter than was the noon-day.

"I have been so fortunate about my last picture," says Esther Horrocks, coming up to him with eager, childish excitement in her tone as he enters her room,

"I thought you would never come; I wanted so to tell you. Yet I knew you would, because you promised. What do you think? Mr. Isaacs has given me seven guineas for it, though for the last, as I told you, he gave me only five."

"Generous Isaacs!"

Something in his tone strikes her so forcibly as to change the expression of her face. Her smile fades; she looks at him with embarrassed scrutiny. Losing a little of his self-control beneath her reproachful glance, he says warmly,—

"I cannot bear to see you wasting your whole life for so paltry a return—for a mere nothing!"

The eager gladness has quite died out of her eyes now.

"It is not for nothing," she says gravely. "I know many who—"

"Yes, I know"—irritably—"get less than you do. You hate me, don't you, because I cannot be glad of your drudgery? And so you think you will make your fortune, and it will be—"

"Sufficient for me," interrupts she, with cold dignity.

"It will not." He goes a step nearer to her, and there is a strange passion in his tone. "How should a girl like you know what is sufficient for her? I tell you—"

"Tell me nothing," says Esther, in a slightly frozen tone. She is strangely hurt. Until to-night he has



been always so kind, so sympathetic, so glad of her small successes.

A silence falls between them.

"Esther," says Sir Gerald at last—it is the first time he has called her by her Christian name, and she starts as her heart gives a heavy throb, and turns aside lest he should see the pallor of her lips—"as you are bent on making this enormous fortune you speak of, off your own bat"—this with an attempt at lightness—"let me tell you something. I met to-day a—a friend of mine, and of amateurs too in the painting line. He has seen something of yours somewhere, and he is most anxious you should paint him a head, a landscape—anything—in fact, everything. I never saw a fellow so in earnest, or so anxious, or so delighted with a picture as he was with yours. He will give you, of course, a far better price than your grasping Jew will give; but"—hurriedly—"only a just value, of course—only what your paintings—which are perfect—deserve."

For a full minute he waits breathlessly for her answer.

"Oh, no—not that!" she says gently, raising to his, eyes heavy with unshed tears, but smiling lips. "I have read about such things as that. I understand, quite. You would buy my pictures yourself, and give me for them fabulous prices, out of the goodness and generosity of your heart. It must be nice to be rich, to be *able to do such things*, and it seems hateful of me to pre-

ent your having the happiness of doing them. But I cannot let you, indeed."

"You will not let me help you?"

"No—not in that way. You are a great help to me in many others. You give me all my pretty flowers"—glancing round her room—"and your friendship, and our interest in all I do. Do these things"—sweetly—not count? And then your goodness to my poor, poor Kate! You do not know what you have done for her in giving her mind-food. The books that you send her live her whole life. How kind you are! You cannot hardly"—coming nearer, and laying her hand upon his arm, and raising softly to his, great, shy, lambent eyes, blue as gentian,—“indeed you cannot guess how I love you for it!”

With grim deliberation Sir Gerald takes her hand from his arm and imprisons it in both his own. His face has grown very pale.

"Is that the exact truth, or a mere figure of speech?" she asks quietly.

"Is what?"

"You say you love me—do you?"

"One must love what is good and true and generous," returns she, bravely trying to keep her hand from trembling.

"That is not an answer. Do you love me?"

She is silent.

"No? Then I am to believe you think me anything but good and true?"

"Oh no, no!"

"Then you do love me. You will marry me?"

At this she resolutely releases the hand he is holding, and stands back from him. Her lips are quivering, but her eyes are steady.

"Do you forget? Are you mad?" she says, in a low tone. "You are bound to marry in your own rank."

"That is what I mean to do. A woman can be only a lady after all."

"I am hardly that, looking at it in the light of your world. My father was a merchant, my mother—a milliner. You must understand, however"—drawing herself up with a sweet proud gesture—"that I am not ashamed of her for that. But—but others might be."

"If so, I am not of those others."

"So you think now; but afterwards—"

"Our afterwards would always be as now, if you love me as I love you. And, if you will only let me have my way—"

"That can never be," returns she sadly. "No; do not say another word. I will not do you this wrong."

"In refusing to marry me you do me the deepest wrong of all. But you will not refuse"—holding out to her both his hands in supplication.

"I shall indeed," returns she resolutely, white to the lips.

"Does that mean, in other words, that I am less than nothing to you?" asks he sternly. "Have all your pretty wiles and looks and blushes had no meaning? Speak, Esther! Confess the truth at least."

But Esther will not confess.

"I don't believe it," says Sir Gerald passionately—"I cannot, I will not. There is truth in your yes, or there is truth in nothing. You will marry me?"

"I shall not indeed," says the girl, recoiling from him with a gesture he misinterprets.

He releases her hand and steps back from her; his face has changed.

"I flattered myself, it seems," he says, with a low, discordant laugh. "What a fool I have been! And now"—looking at her with miserable, searching eyes that say vainly to be scornful—"all this time there has been some other man—"

"No, there has been no other man."

It is with a little passionate effort she says this; and there is a passionate reproach too in her gaze as she turns it upon him.

"How am I to believe you? If that is true, bid me now remain."

"I cannot."

"You tell me deliberately to go! If I do, I shall never return."

"Even so—go!"

"You mean that, Esther?"

"Yes," says the girl faintly, pointing to the door.  
"Go, go!"

"You shall be obeyed, of course."

The very anger and surprise and grief seem all to have died away from him now. He moves towards the door, and then comes back again, and, taking her in his arms, presses his lips to hers for the first time. It is almost as sacred as a dying farewell.

"I shall never cross this threshold again," he says, with an anguish in his voice which amounts to solemnity.

A moment afterwards she awakes to the fact that she is indeed alone; and, flinging herself upon a sofa, she buries her face in her hands.

It seems to her that but an hour or two have elapsed since that last miserable parting, though in reality the night has worn itself away, and is now fading before coming morn, when her door is again opened somewhat hurriedly. Springing to her feet, she sees a stranger standing on the threshold, pale and full of trouble.

"Miss Horrocks," he says hoarsely, "my brother, Sir Gerald Bonde, has met with an accident. He is calling for you incessantly. You will come to him? The doctor says it is his only chance—your presence, I mean. I hardly know what to say; but come to him quickly, quickly!"

A little cold hand seems to clasp her heart. It is all over then! He is dying! Alas, alas, those fatal last words of his, "I shall never cross this threshold again"! In a dull emotionless way she dresses herself, and follows

her guide down the stairs and into the street and the hansom outside.

. . . . .

A darkened room, one or two silent watching figures, a helpless form, a weak yet excited voice crying always, "Esther, Esther!" A tall, aristocratic-looking woman glances curiously towards the doorway as Esther enters the room; but the girl herself sees and hears nothing but the stricken figure, the plaintive cry.

"I am here—I have come!" she whispers tremulously, falling upon her knees beside the bed, and clasping the one uninjured hand between both her own. Her voice, low and *trainante*, catches the wounded man's wandering attention. Again the light of reason warms his eyes; a great content, a greater gladness, covers all his face.

"You—you!" he says feebly; but his hand tightens upon hers, and a faint smile—one of ineffable fondness—curves his lips. "I knew you would come!"

"But for this—for this!" returns she, in a voice of agony.

"Ay, for this! Yet it brings us together! Essie, you remember what was said between us to-day—yesterday—when was it?"—with a painful uncertainty—"that last time we were together. I was wrong when I doubted you! You do love me?"

"Yes—yes."

"There is no one else?"

"There is no one else. There never was, there never will be."

"Winnie!" says Sir Gerald suddenly.

At this the tall woman who had watched Esther's entrance with dismay—his sister, Lady Challoner—comes forward quickly and bends over him.

"What is it, my dearest Gerald?"

"There is something I want to tell you. This"—letting his tired eyes wander to Esther again, and speaking eagerly, though with extreme difficulty—"is the girl I love. You will be good to her? You will treat her as a sister—when I am gone?"

Poor Lady Challoner! It is rather hard on her. Here is a strange young woman, altogether out of her own world, with a beautiful face and a shabby gown, brought to her for the first time, and specially commended to her care. She has been asked to actively befriend the pretty Philistine, to regard her as a sister! She hesitates—more indeed because she hardly knows what it is she can say than from purposed coldness.

"It is my last request—you will grant it, Winnie?" says her brother, in tones even fainter than before.

"I will—I do!" says Lady Challoner hurriedly, with a badly-suppressed sob.

Sir Gerald turns again to Esther.

"You will stay with me?" he says anxiously.

Esther in her turn hesitates, and looks at Lady Challoner with gentle pleading in her gaze.

"If I may," she says simply, yet with pathetic dignity.

"Yes; she shall stay," says Lady Challoner miserably, addressing her brother. As yet it is impossible to her to exchange words with this unknown girl.

"Until the end?" asks the young man, looking only at Esther.

"Until the end," repeats the latter solemnly.

"It won't be long, my love," returns he, with a sad smile, pressing her hand.

At this Lady Challoner breaks into bitter weeping; to Esther, however, it seems as though she and kindly tears have parted company for ever. Her eyes are dry and brilliant, but there is such forlorn misery in her young face that presently Lady Challoner goes up to her and lays her hand impulsively upon her arm, as though in a vain effort to comfort her. Perhaps in so doing she feels she is already beginning the fulfilment of her promise to befriend her. A little later, probably with the same intent, she herself brings to Esther a low-cushioned chair to the side of the bed, and insists upon the girl's rising from her fatiguing position to occupy it.

So the early morning lengthens into noon. Through the jealously-guarded windows the garish sunlight is forcing itself, in spite of blinds and curtains closely drawn. Two or three rakish little beams are frolicking madly upon the coverlet of the sick-bed, dancing over the chest of the wounded man, and playing hide-and-seek in his chestnut hair. They are rioting too, but



lightly, more delicately—as though in their own frivolous fashion they understood her grief and would fain grieve with her—upon Esther's melancholy face.

As noon fades into twilight Bonde opens his eyes again, and, after a troubled semi-conscious moment, lets them fall with glad relief upon Esther, still sitting motionless beside him.

"Still with me!" he says dreamily, with a pleased look. Then—"I fancied I was dead, and had no claim to you in that other world. Do not let my cruel fancy come true, Essie. Let me call you wife before I go."

A shudder runs through Esther's frame; she trembles, and turns pale.

"What is it?" says one of the doctors, stooping anxiously over the patient.

"I want to make her my wife—now, at once. I have made no will; I have done nothing for her. Her poor little hands"—with growing and terrible excitement—"will be at work all day when I am dead, and there will be no one to help her. Tell her to consent to our marriage, and get a clergyman to read the words, and quickly. Where is the one who was here a while since?"

The agitation is increasing. Frightened by it, Sir Henry, the head-physician, takes Lady Challoner apart and converses with her earnestly, hurriedly, in a low tone. Then Esther is appealed to.

"His last chance, if one can call it a chance, lies in

perfect rest of mind and body," says Sir Henry; "any undue excitement will terminate his life probably within the hour. And yet I will not deceive you—I dare not say there is in reality a hope of saving his life by any means; there is only"—gently—"the certainty of rendering his last moments happy. This rests with you"—gazing inquiringly at Esther.

"I will do what he wishes," says Esther, with quivering lips. A little later she is again sitting beside, her husband this time, his hand locked in hers, a look of great content and peace upon his white, worn face.

For three long weary weeks he lingers, hovering between life and death; and then at last there comes a day when the doctors look less grave, and when even a sober smile breaks upon the lips of the youngest of them. Taking Lady Challoner and Esther apart, they whisper to them of a hope sure and certain, and tell them that in all human probability Sir Gerald in time will be again quite what he was before that disastrous accident that brought him to death's door.

"You have indeed much to be grateful for, Lady Bonde," says the eldest physician, turning kindly to Esther.

It is the first time she has been addressed by her married title. She starts violently, being unstrung by the good news just uttered, and glances timidly at Lady Challoner. The latter, however, has turned aside, and fails to catch the nervous expression in the girl's

eyes. Has she avoided it purposely? Sick at heart, in spite of the joyful tidings she has heard, Esther returns to the invalid-chamber, where Sir Gerald is wrapped in a refreshing slumber, light and sound.

Towards evening he opens his eyes again upon his sister and his wife. It is getting dusk; but they both see the happy, triumphant smile with which he looks at Esther.

"I am to live then?" he says radiantly. "So 'I caught you with guile'!" he laughs feebly, but with humour.

Noting his recognition of his wife, Lady Challoner, full of consideration, had risen hastily and gone to a distant window. Esther, with a pale face, follows her, and by a slight but vehement movement compels her to meet her gaze.

"You blame me," she says impetuously; "but it was not my fault. I would have avoided the marriage if I could. I too have my pride! Though I loved him then as I love him now, I would still have left him free to wed some one in his own rank. On that very day, before his accident, he had asked me to marry him, and I had refused." Her voice is unsteady, her hands are trembling as she holds them out with a little gesture full of passionate deprecation. "You must believe me. He himself will tell you so. But, when they told me that I alone had the power to make his last moments happy— Oh, what would you have done? Now Heaven, in mercy, has given him back to me;

but how can I know content, even with him, if those others whom he loves—if *you*—look coldly on me?" Her voice breaks, she draws her breath with a sharp sob, and turns eyes dark with fear and grief upon Lady Challoner.

She need not have feared, however. Going closer to her, Lady Challoner slips her arm round her neck.

"One never looks coldly on anything beloved," she whispers softly, and presses her lips to hers.

THE END.

Long  
JL













